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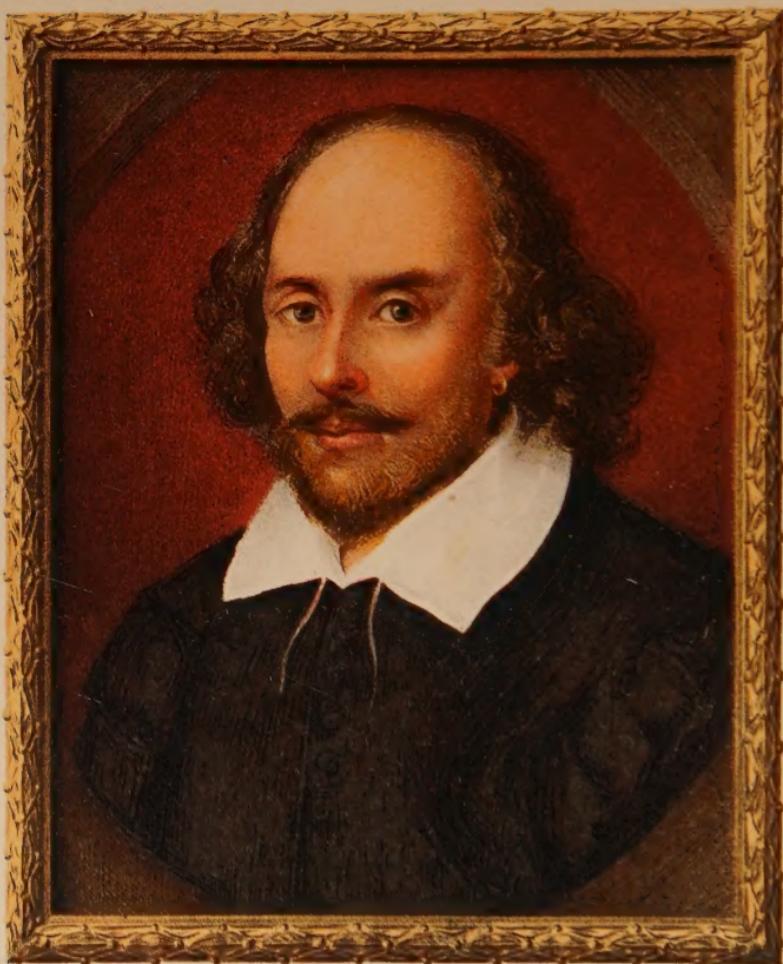
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## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

After the Chandos Portrait in the National Portrait Gallery, London, which is attributed to Richard Burbage or John Taylor. In the catalogue of the National Portrait Gallery the following description is given :

"The Chandos Shakespeare was the property of John Taylor, the player, by whom or by Richard Burbage it was painted. The picture was left by the former in his will to Sir William Davenant. After his death it was bought by Betterton, the actor, upon whose decease Mr. Keck of the Temple purchased it for 40 guineas, from whom it was inherited by Mr. Nicoll of Michenden House, Southgate, Middlesex, whose only daughter married James, Marquess of Caernarvon, afterwards Duke of Chandos, father to Ann Eliza, Duchess of Buckingham."

The above is written on paper attached to the back of the canvas. Its authenticity, however, has been doubted in some quarters.

Purchased at the Stowe Sale, September 1848, by the Earl of Ellesmere, and presented by him to the nation, March 1856.

Dimensions: 22 in. by 16½ in.

This reproduction of the portrait was made from a miniature copy on ivory by Caroline King Phillips.



Daniel F. T. Gould  
17 Arthur Ave. SE  
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# OUTLINES OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CHIEF WRITERS OF  
ENGLAND AND AMERICA, TO THE BOOKS  
THEY WROTE, AND TO THE TIMES  
IN WHICH THEY LIVED

BY  
WILLIAM J. LONG

This is the wey to al good aventure. — CHAUCER

GINN AND COMPANY

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TO MY SISTER  
"MILLIE"  
IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF  
A LIFELONG SYMPATHY



## PREFACE

The last thing we find in making a book is to  
know what to put first. — Pascal

When an author has finished his history, after months or years of happy work, there comes a dismal hour when he must explain its purpose and apologize for its shortcomings.

The explanation in this case is very simple and goes back to a personal experience. When the author first studied the history of our literature there was put into his hands as a textbook a most dreary catalogue of dead authors, dead masterpieces, dead criticisms, dead ages; and a boy who knew chiefly that he was alive was supposed to become interested in this literary sepulchre or else have it said that there was something hopeless about him. Later he learned that the great writers of England and America were concerned with life alone, as the most familiar, the most mysterious, the most fascinating thing in the world, and that the only valuable or interesting feature of any work of literature is its vitality.

To introduce these writers not as dead worthies but as companionable men and women, and to present their living subject as a living thing, winsome as a smile on a human face, — such was the author's purpose in writing this book.

The apology is harder to frame, as anyone knows who has attempted to gather the writers of a thousand years into a single volume that shall have the three virtues of brevity, readability and accuracy. That this record is brief in view of the immensity of the subject is plainly apparent. That it may prove pleasantly readable is a hope inspired chiefly by the fact that it was a pleasure to write it, and that pleasure is

contagious. As for accuracy, every historian who fears God or regards man strives hard enough for that virtue; but after all his striving, remembering the difficulty of criticism and the perversity of names and dates that tend to error as the sparks fly upward, he must still trust heaven and send forth his work with something of Chaucer's feeling when he wrote:

O littel bookë, thou art so unconning,  
How darst thou put thy-self in prees for drede?

Which *may* mean, to one who appreciates Chaucer's wisdom and humor, that having written a little book in what seemed to him an unskilled or "unconning" way, he hesitated to give it to the world for dread of the "prees" or crowd of critics who, even in that early day, were wont to look upon each new book as a camel that must be put through the needle's eye of their tender mercies.

In the selection and arrangement of his material the author has aimed to make a usable book that may appeal to pupils and teachers alike. Because history and literature are closely related (one being the record of man's deed, the other of his thought and feeling) there is a brief historical introduction to every literary period. There is also a review of the general literary tendencies of each age, of the fashions, humors and ideals that influenced writers in forming their style or selecting their subject. Then there is a biography of every important author, written not to offer another subject for hero-worship but to present the man exactly as he was; a review of his chief works, which is intended chiefly as a guide to the best reading; and a critical estimate or appreciation of his writings based partly upon first-hand impressions, partly upon the assumption that an author must deal honestly with life as he finds it and that the business of criticism is, as Emerson said, "not to legislate but to raise the dead." This detailed study of the greater writers of a period is followed by an examination of some of the minor writers and their memorable

works. Finally, each chapter concludes with a concise summary of the period under consideration, a list of selections for reading and a bibliography of works that will be found most useful in acquiring a larger knowledge of the subject.

In its general plan this little volume is modeled on the author's more advanced *English Literature* and *American Literature*; but the material, the viewpoint, the presentation of individual writers, — all the details of the work are entirely new. Such a book is like a second journey through ample and beautiful regions filled with historic associations, a journey that one undertakes with new companions, with renewed pleasure and, it is to be hoped, with increased wisdom. It is hardly necessary to add that our subject has still its unvoiced charms, that it cannot be exhausted or even adequately presented in any number of histories. For literature deals with life; and life, with its endlessly surprising variety in unity, has happily some suggestion of infinity.

WILLIAM J. LONG

STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT



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# OUTLINES OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: AN ESSAY OF LITERATURE

*(Not a Lesson, but an Invitation)*

I sleep, yet I love to be wakened, and love to see  
The fresh young faces bending over me ;  
And the faces of them that are old, I love them too,  
For these, as well, in the days of their youth I knew.

“Song of the Well”

**What is Literature?** In an old English book, written before Columbus dreamed of a westward journey to find the East, is the story of a traveler who set out to search the world for wisdom. Through Palestine and India he passed, traveling by sea or land through many seasons, till he came to a wonderful island where he saw a man plowing in the fields. And the wonder was, that the man was calling familiar words to his oxen, “such wordes as men speken to bestes in his owne lond.” Startled by the sound of his mother tongue he turned back on his course “in gret mervayle, for he knewe not how it myghte be.” But if he had passed on a little, says the old record, “he would have founden his contree and his owne knouleche.”

Facing a new study of literature our impulse is to search in strange places for a definition ; but though we compass a world of books, we must return at last, like the worthy man of *Mandeville's Travels*, to our own knowledge. Since childhood we have been familiar with this noble subject of literature. We have entered into the heritage of the ancient Greeks, who

thought that Homer was a good teacher for the nursery; we have made acquaintance with Psalm and Prophecy and Parable, with the knightly tales of Malory, with the fairy stories of Grimm or Andersen, with the poetry of Shakespeare, with the novels of Scott or Dickens,—in short, with some of the best books that the world has ever produced. We know, therefore, what literature is, and that it is an excellent thing which ministers to the joy of living; but when we are asked to define the subject, we are in the position of St. Augustine, who said of time, "If you ask me what time is, I know not; but if you ask me not, then I know." For literature is like happiness, or love, or life itself, in that it can be understood or appreciated but can never be exactly described. It has certain describable qualities, however, and the best place to discover these is our own bookcase.

Here on a shelf are a Dictionary, a History of America, a text on Chemistry, which we read or study for information;

**The Tree and the Book** on a higher shelf are *As You Like It*, *Hiawatha*, *Lorna Doone*, *The Oregon Trail*, and other works to which we go for pleasure when the day's work is done. In one sense all these and all other books are literature; for the root meaning of the word is "letters," and a letter means a character inscribed or rubbed upon a prepared surface. A series of letters intelligently arranged forms a book, and for the root meaning of "book" you must go to a tree; because the Latin word for book, *liber*, means the inner layer of bark that covers a tree bole, and "book" or "boc" is the old English name for the beech, on whose silvery surface our ancestors carved their first runic letters.

So also when we turn the "leaves" of a book, our mind goes back over a long trail: through rattling printing-shop, and peaceful monk's cell, and gloomy cave with walls covered with picture writing, till the trail ends beside a shadowy forest, where primitive man takes a smooth leaf and inscribes his thought upon it by means of a pointed stick. A tree is the

Adam of all books, and everything that the hand of man has written upon the tree or its products or its substitutes is literature. But that is too broad a definition ; we must limit it by excluding what does not here concern us.

Our first exclusion is of that immense class of writings—books of science, history, philosophy, and the rest—to which

**Books of Knowledge and of Power** we go for information. These aim to preserve or to systematize the discoveries of men ; they appeal chiefly to the intellect, and they are known as the literature of knowledge. There remains another large class of writings, sometimes called the literature of power, consisting of poems, plays, essays, stories of every kind, to which we go treasure-hunting for happiness or counsel, for noble thoughts or fine feelings, for rest of body or exercise of spirit,—for almost everything, in fine, except information. As Chaucer said, long ago, such writings are :

For pleasaunce high, and for noon other end.

They aim to give us pleasure ; they appeal chiefly to our imagination and our emotions ; they awaken in us a feeling of sympathy or admiration for whatever is beautiful in nature or society or the soul of man.

The author who would attempt books of such high purpose must be careful of both the matter and the manner of his **The Art of Literature** writing, must give one thought to what he shall say and another thought to how he shall say it. He selects the best or most melodious words, the finest figures, and aims to make his story or poem beautiful in itself, as a painter strives to reflect a face or a landscape in a beautiful way. Any photographer can in a few minutes reproduce a human face, but only an artist can by care and labor bring forth a beautiful portrait. So any historian can write the facts of the Battle of Gettysburg ; but only a Lincoln can in noble words reveal the beauty and immortal meaning of that mighty conflict.

To all such written works, which quicken our sense of the beautiful, and which are as a Jacob's ladder on which we mount for higher views of nature or humanity, we confidently give the name "literature," meaning the art of literature in distinction from the mere craft of writing.

Such a definition, though it cuts out the greater part of human records, is still too broad for our purpose, and again

**The Passing and the Permanent** we must limit it by a process of exclusion. For to study almost any period of English letters is to discover that it produced hundreds of books which served the purpose of literature, if only for a season, by affording pleasure to readers. No sooner were they written than Time began to winnow them over and over, giving them to all the winds of opinion, one generation after another, till the hosts of ephemeral works were swept aside, and only a remnant was left in the hands of the winnower. To this remnant, books of abiding interest, on which the years have no effect save to mellow or flavor them, we give the name of great or enduring literature ; and with these chiefly we deal in our present study.

To the inevitable question, What are the marks of great literature? no positive answer can be returned. As a tree is judged by its fruits, so is literature judged not by **The Quality of Greatness** theory but by the effect which it produces on human life ; and the judgment is first personal, then general. If a book has power to awaken in you a lively sense of pleasure or a profound emotion of sympathy ; if it quickens your love of beauty or truth or goodness ; if it moves you to generous thought or noble action, then that book is, for you and for the time, a great book. If after ten or fifty years it still has power to quicken you, then for you at least it is a great book forever. And if it affects many other men and women as it affects you, and if it lives with power from one generation to another, gladdening the children as it gladdened the fathers, then surely it is great literature, without further qualification or need of

definition. From this viewpoint the greatest poem in the world—greatest in that it abides in most human hearts as a loved and honored guest—is not a mighty *Iliad* or *Paradise Lost* or *Divine Comedy*; it is a familiar little poem of a dozen lines, beginning "The Lord is my Shepherd."

It is obvious that great literature, which appeals to all classes of men and to all times, cannot go far afield for rare subjects, or follow new inventions, or concern itself with fashions that are here to-day and gone to-morrow. Its only subjects are nature and human nature; it deals with common experiences of joy or sorrow, pain or pleasure, that all men understand; it cherishes the unchanging ideals of love, faith, duty, freedom, reverence, courtesy, which were old to the men who kept their flocks on the plains of Shinar, and which will be young as the morning to our children's children.

Such ideals tend to ennable a writer, and therefore are great books characterized by lofty thought, by fine feeling and, as a rule, by a beautiful simplicity of expression. They have another quality, hard to define but easy to understand, a quality which leaves upon us the impression of eternal youth, as if they had been dipped in the fountain which Ponce de Leon sought for in vain through the New World. If a great book could speak, it would use the words of the Cobzar (poet) in his "Last Song":

The merry Spring, he is my brother,  
And when he comes this way  
Each year again, he always asks me:  
"Art thou not yet grown gray?"  
But I, I keep my youth forever,  
Even as the Spring his May.

**A Definition.** Literature, then, if one must formulate a definition, is the written record of man's best thought and feeling, and English literature is the part of that record which belongs to the English people. In its broadest sense literature includes all writing, but as we commonly define the term it excludes

works which aim at instruction, and includes only the works which aim to give pleasure, and which are artistic in that they reflect nature or human life in a way to arouse our sense of beauty. In a still narrower sense, when we study the history of literature we deal chiefly with the great, the enduring books, which may have been written in an elder or a latter day, but which have in them the magic of all time.

One may easily challenge such a definition, which, like most others, is far from faultless. It is difficult, for example, to draw the line sharply between instructive and pleasure-giving works ; for many an instructive book of history gives us pleasure, and there may be more instruction on important matters in a pleasurable poem than in a treatise on ethics. Again, there are historians who allege that English literature must include not simply the works of Britain but everything written in the English language. There are other objections ; but to straighten them all out is to be long in starting, and there is a pleasant journey ahead of us. Chaucer had literature in mind when he wrote :

Through me men goon into that blisful place  
Of hertës hele and dedly woundës cure ;  
Through me men goon unto the wells of grace,  
Ther grene and lusty May shal ever endure :  
This is the wey to al good aventurē.

## CHAPTER II

### BEGINNINGS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

Then the warrior, battle-tried, touched the sounding glee-wood:  
Straight awoke the harp's sweet note; straight a song uprose,  
Sooth and sad its music. Then from hero's lips there fell  
A wonder-tale, well told.

*Beowulf*, line 2017 (a free rendering)

In its beginnings English literature is like a river, which proceeds not from a single wellhead but from many springs, each sending forth its rivulet of sweet or bitter water. As there is a place where the river assumes a character of its own, distinct from all its tributaries, so in English literature there is a time when it becomes national rather than tribal, and English rather than Saxon or Celtic or Norman. That time was in the fifteenth century, when the poems of Chaucer and the printing press of Caxton exalted the Midland above all other dialects and established it as the literary language of England.

Before that time, if you study the records of Britain, you meet several different tribes and races of men: the native Celt, <sup>Tributaries</sup> the law-giving Roman, the colonizing Saxon, the <sup>of Literature</sup> sea-roving Dane, the feudal baron of Normandy, each with his own language and literature reflecting the traditions of his own people. Here in these old records is a strange medley of folk heroes, Arthur and Beowulf, Cnut and Brutus, Finn and Cuchulain, Roland and Robin Hood. Older than the tales of such folk-heroes are ancient riddles, charms, invocations to earth and sky:

Hal wes thu, Folde, fira moder!  
Hail to thee, Earth, thou mother of men!

With these pagan spells are found the historical writings of the Venerable Bede, the devout hymns of Cædmon, Welsh legends, Irish and Scottish fairy stories, Scandinavian myths, Hebrew and Christian traditions, romances from distant Italy which had traveled far before the Italians welcomed them. All these and more, whether originating on British soil or brought in by missionaries or invaders, held each to its own course for a time, then met and mingled in the swelling stream which became English literature.

To trace all these tributaries to their obscure and lonely sources would require the labor of a lifetime. We shall here



STONEHENGE, ON SALISBURY PLAIN

Probably the ruins of a temple of the native Britons

examine only the two main branches of our early literature, to the end that we may better appreciate the vigor and variety of modern English. The first is the Anglo-Saxon, which came into England in the middle of the fifth century with the colonizing Angles, Jutes and Saxons from the shores of the North Sea and the Baltic; the second is the Norman-French, which arrived six centuries later at the time of the Norman invasion. Except in their emphasis on personal courage, there is a marked contrast between these two branches, the former being stern and somber, the latter gay and fanciful. In Anglo-Saxon poetry we meet a strong man who cherishes his own ideals of

honor, in Norman-French poetry a youth eagerly interested in romantic tales gathered from all the world. One represents life as a profound mystery, the other as a happy adventure

ANGLO-SAXON OR OLD-ENGLISH PERIOD. (450-1050)

**Specimens of the Language.** Our English speech has changed so much in the course of centuries that it is now impossible to read our earliest records without special study; but that Anglo-Saxon is our own and not a foreign tongue may appear from the following examples. The first is a stanza from "Widsith," the chant of a wandering gleeman or minstrel; and for comparison we place beside it Andrew Lang's modern version. Nobody knows how old "Widsith" is; it may have been sung to the accompaniment of a harp that was broken fourteen hundred years ago. The second, much easier to read, is from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which was prepared by King Alfred from an older record in the ninth century:

Swa scrithende  
gesceapum hweorfath,  
Gleomen gumena  
geond grunda fela;  
Thearfe secgath,  
thonc-word sprecath,  
Simle, suth oththe north  
sumne gemetath,  
Gydda gleawne  
geofam unhneawne.

So wandering on  
the world about,  
Gleemen do roam  
through many lands;  
They say their needs,  
they speak their thanks,  
Sure, south or north  
someone to meet,  
Of songs to judge  
and gifts not grudge.

Her Hengest and Aesc, his sunu, gefuhton wid Bryttas on thaere stowe  
the is gecweden Creccanford, and thaer ofslogon feower thusenda wera.  
And tha Bryttas tha forleton Cent-lond, and mid myclum ege flugon to  
Lundenbyrig.

At this time Hengist and Esk, his son, fought with the Britons at the place that is called Crayford, and there slew four thousand men. And the Britons then forsook Kentland, and with much fear fled to London town.

**Beowulf.** The old epic poem, called after its hero Beowulf, is more than myth or legend, more even than history; it is a picture of a life and a world that once had real existence. Of

that vanished life, that world of ancient Englishmen, only a few material fragments remain: a bit of linked armor, a rusted sword with runic inscriptions, the oaken ribs of a war galley buried with the Viking who had sailed it on stormy seas, and who was entombed in it because he loved it. All these are silent witnesses; they have no speech or language. But this old poem is a living voice, speaking with truth and sincerity of the daily habit of the fathers of modern England, of their adventures by sea or land, their stern courage and grave courtesy, their ideals of manly honor, their thoughts of life and death.

Let us hear, then, the story of *Beowulf*, picturing in our imagination the story-teller and his audience. The scene opens in a great hall, where a fire blazes on the hearth and flashes upon polished shields against the timbered walls. Down the long room stretches a table where men are feasting or passing a beaker from hand to hand, and anon crying *Hal! hal!* in answer to song or in greeting to a guest. At the head of the hall sits the chief with his chosen ealdormen. At a sign from the chief a gleeman rises and strikes a single clear note from his harp. Silence falls on the benches; the story begins:

Hail! we of the Spear Danes in days of old  
Have heard the glory of warriors sung;  
Have cheered the deeds that our chieftains wrought,  
And the brave Scyld's triumph o'er his foes.

Then because there are Scyldings present, and because brave men revere their ancestors, the gleeman tells a beautiful legend of how King Scyld came and went: how he arrived as a little child, in a war-galley that no man sailed, asleep amid jewels and weapons; and how, when his life ended at the call of Wyrd or Fate, they placed him against the mast of a ship, with treasures heaped around him and a golden banner above his head, gave ship and cargo to the winds, and sent their chief nobly back to the deep whence he came.

So with picturesque words the gleeman thrills his hearers with a vivid picture of a Viking's sea-burial. It thrills us now, when the Vikings are no more, and when no other picture can be drawn by an eyewitness of that splendid pagan rite.

The Story of Heorot

One of Scyld's descendants was King Hrothgar (Roger) who built the hall Heorot, where the king and his men used to gather nightly to feast, and to listen to the songs of scop or gleeman.<sup>1</sup> "There was joy of heroes," but in one night the joy was changed to mourning. Out on the lonely fens dwelt the jotun (giant or monster) Grendel, who heard the sound of men's mirth and quickly made an end of it. One night, as the thanes slept in the hall, he burst in the door and carried off thirty warriors to devour them in his lair under the sea. Another and another horrible raid followed, till Heorot was deserted and the fear of Grendel reigned among the Spear Danes. There were brave men among them, but of what use was courage when their weapons were powerless against the monster? "Their swords would not bite on his body."

For twelve years this terror continued; then the rumor of Grendel reached the land of the Geats, where Beowulf lived at the court of his uncle, King Hygelac. No sooner did Beowulf hear of a dragon to be slain, of a friendly king "in need of a man," than he selected fourteen companions and launched his war-galley in search of adventure.

The Sailing of Beowulf

At this point the old epic becomes a remarkable portrayal of daily life. In its picturesque lines we see the galley set sail, foam flying from her prow; we catch the first sight of the southern headlands, approach land, hear the challenge of the "warder of the cliffs" and Beowulf's courteous answer. We follow the march to Heorot in war-gear, spears flashing, swords and byrnies clanking, and witness the exchange of greetings between Hrothgar and the young hero. Again is the feast spread in Heorot; once more is heard the song of gleemen, the joyous sound of warriors in comradeship. There is also a significant picture of Hrothgar's wife, "mindful of courtesies," honoring her guests by passing the mead-cup with her own hands. She is received by these stern men with profound respect.

When the feast draws to an end the fear of Grendel returns. Hrothgar warns his guests that no weapon can harm the monster, that it is death to sleep in the hall; then the Spear Danes retire, leaving Beowulf and his companions to keep watch and ward. With the careless confidence of brave men, forthwith they all fall asleep:

Forth from the fens, from the misty moorlands,  
Grendel came gliding — God's wrath he bore —  
Came under clouds until he saw clearly,  
Glittering with gold plates, the mead-hall of men.

<sup>1</sup> Like Agamemnon and the Greek chieftains, every Saxon leader had his gleeman or minstrel, and had also his own poet, his scop or "shaper," whose duty it was to shape a glorious deed into more glorious verse. So did our pagan ancestors build their monuments out of songs that should live in the hearts of men when granite or earth mound had crumbled away.

Down fell the door, though hardened with fire-bands,  
 Open it sprang at the stroke of his paw.  
 Swollen with rage burst in the bale-bringer,  
 Flamed in his eyes a fierce light, likkest fire.

Throwing himself upon the nearest sleeper Grendel crushes and swallows him; then he stretches out a paw towards Beowulf, only to find it " seized in such a grip as the fiend had never felt before." A desperate conflict begins, and a mighty uproar, — crashing of benches, shoutings of men, the " war-song " of Grendel, who is trying to break the grip of his foe. As the monster struggles toward the door, dragging the hero with him, a wide wound opens on his shoulder; the sinews snap, and with a mighty wrench Beowulf tears off the whole limb. While Grendel rushes howling across the fens, Beowulf hangs the grisly arm with its iron claws, " the whole grapple of Grendel," over the door where all may see it.

Once more there is joy in Heorot, songs, speeches, the liberal giving of gifts. Thinking all danger past, the Danes sleep in the hall; but at midnight comes the mother of Grendel, raging to avenge her son. Seizing the king's bravest companion she carries him away, and he is never seen again.

Here is another adventure for Beowulf. To old Hrothgar, lamenting his lost earl, the hero says simply:

Wise chief, sorrow not. For a man it is meet  
 His friend to avenge, not to mourn for his loss;  
 For death comes to all, but honor endures:  
 Let him win it who will, ere Wyrd to him calls,  
 And fame be the fee of a warrior dead!

Following the trail of the *Brinwylf* or *Merewif* (sea-wolf or sea-woman) Beowulf and his companions pass through desolate regions to a wild cliff on the shore. There a friend offers his good sword Hrunting for the combat, and Beowulf accepts the weapon, saying:

ic me mid Hruntinge  
 Dom gewyrce, oththe mec death nimeth.  
 I with Hrunting  
 Honor will win, or death shall me take.

Then he plunges into the black water, is attacked on all sides by the *Grundwrygen* or bottom monsters, and as he stops to fight them is seized by the *Merewif* and dragged into a cave, a mighty " sea-hall " free from water and filled with a strange light. On its floor are vast treasures; its walls are adorned with weapons; in a corner huddles the wounded Grendel. All this Beowulf sees in a glance as he turns to fight his new foe.

**The Dragon's  
Cave**

Follows then another terrific combat, in which the brand Hrunting proves useless. Though it rings out its "clanging war-song" on the monster's scales, it will not "bite" on the charmed body. Beowulf is down, and at the point of death, when his eye lights on a huge sword forged by the jotuns of old. Struggling to his feet he seizes the weapon, whirls it around his head for a mighty blow, and the fight is won. Another blow cuts off the head of Grendel, but at the touch of the poisonous blood the steel blade melts like ice before the fire.

Leaving all the treasures, Beowulf takes only the golden hilt of the magic sword and the head of Grendel, re-enters the sea and mounts up to his companions. They welcome him as one returned from the dead. They relieve him of helmet and byrnies, and swing away in a triumphal procession to Heorot. The hero towers among them, a conspicuous figure, and next to him comes the enormous head of Grendel carried on a spear-shaft by four of the stoutest thanes.

More feasting, gifts, noble speeches follow before the hero returns to his own land, laden with treasures. So ends the first part of the epic. In

The second part Beowulf succeeds Hygelac as chief of the Firedrake Geats, and rules them well for fifty years. Then a "fire-drake," guarding an immense hoard of treasure (as in most of the old dragon stories), begins to ravage the land. Once more the aged Beowulf goes forth to champion his people; but he feels that "Wyrd is close to hand," and the fatalism which pervades all the poem is finely expressed in his speech to his companions. In his last fight he kills the dragon, winning the dragon's treasure for his people; but as he battles amid flame and smoke the fire enters his lungs, and he dies "as dies a man," paying for victory with his life. Among his last words is a command which reminds us again of the old Greeks, and of the word of Elpenor to Odysseus:

"Bid my brave men raise a barrow for me on the headland, broad, high, to be seen far out at sea; that hereafter sea-farers, driving their foamy keels through ocean's mist, may behold and say, 'T is Beowulf's mound!'"

The hero's last words and the closing scenes of the epic, including the funeral pyre, the "bale-fire" and another Viking burial to the chant of armed men riding their war steeds, are among the noblest that have come down to us from beyond the dawn of history.

Such, in brief outline, is the story of *Beowulf*. It is recorded on a fire-marked manuscript, preserved as by a miracle from the torch of the Danes, which is now one of the priceless treasures of the British Museum. The handwriting indicates that the manuscript was copied about the year 1100, but the

language points to the eighth or ninth century, when the poem in its present form was probably composed on English soil.<sup>1</sup>

**Anglo-Saxon Songs.** Beside the epic of *Beowulf* a few mutilated poems have been preserved, and these are as fragments of a plate or film upon which the life of long ago left its impression. One of the oldest of these poems is "Widsith," the "wide-goer," which describes the wanderings and rewards of the ancient gleeman. It begins :

Widsith spake, his word-hoard unlocked,  
He who farthest had fared among earth-folk and tribe-folk.

Then follows a recital of the places he had visited, and the gifts he had received for his singing. Some of the personages named are real, others mythical ; and as the list covers half a world and several centuries of time, it is certain that Widsith's recital cannot be taken literally.

Two explanations offer themselves : the first, that the poem contains the work of many scops, each of whom added his <sup>Meaning of</sup> <sup>Widsith</sup> travels to those of his predecessor ; the second, that Widsith, like other gleemen, was both historian and poet, a keeper of tribal legends as well as a shaper of songs, and that he was ever ready to entertain his audience with things new or old. Thus, he mentioned Hrothgar as one whom he had visited ; and if a hearer called for a tale at this point, the scop would recite that part of *Beowulf* which tells of the monster Grendel. Again, he named Sigard the Volsung (the Siegfried of the *Niebelungenlied* and of Wagner's opera), and this would recall the slaying of the dragon Fafnir, or some other

<sup>1</sup> Materials used in *Beowulf* are very old, and may have been brought to England during the Anglo-Saxon invasion. Parts of the material, such as the dragon-fights, are purely mythical. They relate to Beowa, a superman, of whom many legends were told by Scandinavian minstrels. The Grendel legend, for example, appears in the Icelandic saga of Gretti, who slays the dragon Glam. Other parts of *Beowulf* are old battle songs ; and still others, relating to King Hygelac and his nephew, have some historical foundation. So little is known about the epic that one cannot safely make any positive statement as to its origin. It was written in crude, uneven lines ; but a rhythmic, martial effect, as of marching men, was produced by strong accent and alliteration, and the effect was strengthened by the harp with which the gleeman always accompanied his recital.

story of the old Norse saga. So every name or place which Widsith mentioned was an invitation. When he came to a hall and "unlocked his word-hoard," he offered his hearers a variety of poems and legends from which they made their own selection. Looked at in this way, the old poem becomes an epitome of Anglo-Saxon literature.

Other fragments of the period are valuable as indicating that the Anglo-Saxons were familiar with various types of poetry.

**Types of Saxon Poetry** "Deor's Lament," describing the sorrows of a scop who had lost his place beside his chief, is a true lyric; that is, a poem which reflects the author's feeling rather than the deed of another man. In his grief the scop comforts himself by recalling the afflictions of various heroes, and he ends each stanza with the refrain:

That sorrow he endured; this also may I.

Among the best of the early poems are: "The Ruined City," reflecting the feeling of one who looks on crumbling walls that were once the abode of human ambition; "The Seafarer," a chantey of the deep, which ends with an allegory comparing life to a sea voyage; "The Wanderer," which is the plaint of one who has lost home, patron, ambition, and as the easiest way out of his difficulty turns *eardstappa*, an "earth-hitter" or tramp; "The Husband's Message," which is the oldest love song in our literature; and a few ballads and battle songs, such as "The Battle of Brunanburh" (familiar to us in Tennyson's translation) and "The Fight at Finnsburgh," which was mentioned by the gleemen in *Beowulf*, and which was then probably as well known as "The Charge of the Light Brigade" is to modern Englishmen.

Another early war song, "The Battle of Maldon" or "Byrthnoth's Death," has seldom been rivaled in savage vigor or in the expression of deathless loyalty to a chosen leader. The climax of the poem is reached when the few survivors of an uneven battle make a ring of spears about their fallen chief,

shake their weapons in the face of an overwhelming horde of Danes, while Byrhtwold, "the old comrade," chants their defiance :

The sterner shall thought be, the bolder our hearts,  
The greater the mood as lessens our might.

We know not when or by whom this stirring battle cry was written. It was copied under date of 991 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and is commonly called the swan song of Anglo-Saxon poetry. The lion song would be a better name for it.

**Later Prose and Poetry.** The works we have just considered were wholly pagan in spirit, but all reference to Thor or other gods was excluded by the monks who first wrote down the scop's poetry.

With the coming of these monks a reform swept over pagan England, and literature reflected the change in a variety of ways. For example, early Anglo-Saxon poetry was mostly warlike, for the reason that the various earldoms were in constant strife ; but now the peace of good will was preached, and moral courage, the triumph of self-control, was exalted above mere physical hardihood. In the new literature the adventures of Columb or Aidan or Brendan were quite as thrilling as any legends of Beowulf or Sigard, but the climax of the adventure was spiritual, and the emphasis was always on moral heroism.

Another result of the changed condition was that the unlettered scop, who carried his whole stock of poetry in his head, was replaced by the literary monk, who had behind him the immense culture of the Latin language, and who was interested in world history or Christian doctrine rather than in tribal fights or pagan mythology. These monks were capable men ; they understood the appeal of pagan poetry, and their motto was, "Let nothing good be wasted." So they made careful copy of the scop's best songs (else had not a shred of early poetry survived), and so the pagan's respect for womanhood, his courage, his loyalty to a chief, — all his virtues were

recognized and turned to religious account in the new literature. Even the beautiful pagan scrolls, or "dragon knots," once etched on a warrior's sword, were reproduced in glowing colors in the initial letters of the monk's illuminated Gospel.

A third result of the peaceful conquest of the missionaries was that many monasteries were established in Britain, each a center of learning and of writing. So arose the famous Northumbrian School of literature, to which we owe the writings of Bede, Cædmon, Cynewulf and others associated with certain old monasteries, such as Peterborough, Jarrow, York and Whitby, all north of the river Humber.

**Bede.** The good work of the monks is finely exemplified in the life of the Venerable Bede, or Bæda (*cir.* 673-735), who is well called the father of English learning. As a boy he entered the Benedictine monastery at Jarrow; the temper of his manhood may be judged from a single sentence of his own record :

"While attentive to the discipline of mine order and the daily care of singing in the church, my constant delight was in learning or teaching or writing."

It is hardly too much to say that this gentle scholar was for half a century the teacher of Europe. He collected a large library of manuscripts; he was the author of some forty works, covering the whole field of human knowledge in his day; and to his school at Jarrow came hundreds of pupils from all parts of the British Isles, and hundreds more from the Continent. Of all his works the most notable is the so-called "Ecclesiastical History" (*Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*) which should be named the "History of the Race of Angles." This book marks the beginning of our literature of knowledge, and to it we are largely indebted for what we know of English history from the time of Cæsar's invasion to the early part of the eighth century.

All the extant works of Bede are in Latin, but we are told by his pupil Cuthbert that he was "skilled in our English

songs," that he made poems and translated the Gospel of John into English. These works, which would now be of priceless value, were all destroyed by the plundering Danes.

As an example of Bede's style, we translate a typical passage from his History. The scene is the Saxon *Witenagemôt*, or council of wise men, called by King Edward (625) to consider the doctrine of Paulinus, who had been sent from Rome by Pope Gregory. The first speaker is Coifi, a priest of the old religion :

" Consider well, O king, this new doctrine which is preached to us: for I now declare, what I have learned for certain, that the old religion has no virtue in it. For none of your people has been more diligent than I in the worship of our gods; yet many receive more favors from you, and are preferred above me, and are more prosperous in their affairs. If the old gods had any discernment, they would surely favor me, since I have been most diligent in their service. It is expedient, therefore, if this new faith that is preached is any more profitable than the old, that we accept it without delay."

Whereupon Coifi, who as a priest has hitherto been obliged to ride upon an ass with wagging ears, calls loudly for a horse, a prancing horse, a stallion, and cavorts off, a crowd running at his heels, to hurl a spear into the shrine where he lately worshiped. He is a good type of the political demagogue, who clamors for progress when he wants an office, and whose spear is more likely to be hurled at the back of a friend than at the breast of an enemy.

Then a pagan chief rises to speak, and we bow to a nobler motive. His allegory of the mystery of life is like a strain of Anglo-Saxon poetry; it moves us deeply, as it moved his hearers ten centuries ago :

" This present life of man, O king, in comparison with the time that is hidden from us, is as the flight of a sparrow through the room where you sit at supper, with companions around you and a good fire on the hearth. Outside are the storms of wintry rain and snow. The sparrow flies in at one opening, and instantly out at another: whilst he is within he is sheltered from the winter storms, but after a moment of pleasant weather he speeds from winter back to winter again, and vanishes from your sight into the darkness whence he came. Even so the life of man appears for a little

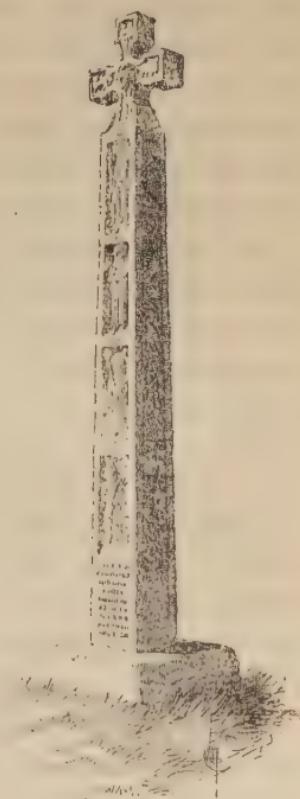
time; but of what went before and of what comes after we are wholly ignorant. If this new religion can teach us anything of greater certainty, it surely deserves to be followed.”<sup>1</sup>

**Cædmon (Seventh Century).** In a beautiful chapter of Bede’s History we may read how Cædmon (d. 680) discovered his gift of poetry. He was, says the record, a poor unlettered servant of the Abbess Hilda, in her monastery at Whitby. At that time (and here is an interesting commentary on monastic culture) singing and poetry were so familiar that, whenever a feast was given, a harp would be brought in, and each monk or guest would in turn entertain the company with a song or poem to his own musical accompaniment. But Cædmon could not sing, and when he saw the harp coming down the table he would slip away ashamed, to perform his humble duties in the monastery:

“Now it happened once that he did this thing at a certain festivity, and went out to the stable to care for the horses, this duty being assigned him for that night. As he slept at the usual time one stood by him, saying, ‘Cædmon, sing me something.’ He answered, ‘I cannot sing, and that is why I came hither from the feast.’ But he who spake unto him said again, ‘Cædmon, sing to me.’ And he said, ‘What shall I sing?’ And that one said, ‘Sing the beginning of created things.’ Thereupon Cædmon began to sing verses that he had never heard before, of this import:

Nu scylun hergan hefænriches ward . . .  
Now shall we hallow the warden of heaven,  
He the Creator, he the Allfather,  
Deeds of his might and thoughts of his mind. . . .”

<sup>1</sup> Bede, *Historia*, Book II, chap. xiii, a free translation.



CÆDMON CROSS AT WHITBY  
ABBEY

In the morning he remembered the words, and came humbly to the monks to recite the first recorded Christian hymn in our language. And a very noble hymn it is. The monks heard him in wonder, and took him to the Abbess Hilda, who gave order that Cædmon should receive instruction and enter the monastery as one of the brethren. Then the monks expounded to him the Scriptures. He in turn, reflecting on what he had heard, echoed it back to the monks "in such melodious words that his teachers became his pupils." So, says the record, the whole course of Bible history was turned into excellent poetry.

About a thousand years later, in the days of Milton, an Anglo-Saxon manuscript was discovered containing a metrical paraphrase of the books of Genesis, Exodus and Daniel, and these were supposed to be some of the poems mentioned in Bede's narrative. A study of the poems (now known as the Cædmonian Cycle) leads to the conclusion that they were probably the work of two or three writers, and it has not been determined what part Cædmon had in their composition. The nobility of style in the Genesis poem and the picturesque account of the fallen angels (which reappears in *Paradise Lost*) have won for Cædmon his designation as the Milton of the Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>1</sup>

**Cynewulf (Eighth Century).** There is a variety of poems belonging to the Cynewulf Cycle, and of some of these Cynewulf (born *cir.* 750) was certainly the author, since he wove his name into the verses in the manner of an acrostic. Of Cynewulf's life we know nothing with certainty; but from various poems which are attributed to him, and which undoubtedly reflect some personal experience, scholars have constructed the following biography, — which may or may not be true.

<sup>1</sup> A friend of Milton, calling himself Franciscus Junius, first printed the Cædmon poems in Antwerp (*cir.* 1655) during Milton's lifetime. The Puritan poet was blind at the time, and it is not certain that he ever saw or heard the poems; yet there are many parallelisms in the earlier and later works which warrant the conclusion that Milton was influenced by Cædmon's work.

In his early life Cynewulf was probably a wandering scop of the old pagan kind, delighting in wild nature, in adventure, in the clamor of fighting men. To this period belong his "Riddles"<sup>1</sup> and his vigorous descriptions of the sea and of battle, which show hardly a trace of Christian influence. Then came trouble to Cynewulf, perhaps in the ravages of the Danes, and some deep spiritual experience of which he writes in a way to remind us of the Puritan age:

"In the prison of the night I pondered with myself. I was stained with my own deeds, bound fast in my sins, hard smitten with sorrows, walled in by miseries."

A wondrous vision of the cross, "brightest of beacons," shone suddenly through his darkness, and led him forth into light and joy. Then he wrote his "Vision of the Rood" and probably also *Juliana* and *The Christ*. In the last period of his life, a time of great serenity, he wrote *Andreas*, a story of St. Andrew combining religious instruction with extraordinary adventure; *Elene*, which describes the search for the cross on which Christ died, and which is a prototype of the search for the Holy Grail; and other poems of the same general kind.<sup>2</sup> Aside from the value of these works as a reflection of Anglo-Saxon ideals, they are our best picture of Christianity as it appeared in England during the eighth and ninth centuries.

**Alfred the Great** (848-901). We shall understand the importance of Alfred's work if we remember how his country fared when he became king of the West Saxons, in 871. At that time England lay at the mercy of the Danish sea-rovers. Soon after Bede's death they fell upon Northumbria, hewed out with their swords a place of settlement, and were soon

<sup>1</sup> These riddles are ancient conundrums, in which some familiar object, such as a bow, a ship, a storm lashing the shore, the moon riding the clouds like a Viking's boat, is described in poetic language, and the last line usually calls on the hearer to name the object described. See Cook and Tinker, *Translations from Old English Poetry*.

<sup>2</sup> There is little agreement among scholars as to who wrote most of these poems. The only works to which Cynewulf signs his name are *The Christ*, *Elene*, *Juliana* and *Fates of the Apostles*. All others are doubtful, and our biography of Cynewulf is largely a matter of pleasant speculation.

lords of the whole north country. Being pagans ("Thor's men" they called themselves) they sacked the monasteries, burned the libraries, made a lurid end of the civilization which men like Columb and Bede had built up in North-Humberland. Then they pushed southward, and were in process of paganizing all England when they were turned back by the heroism of Alfred.

How he accomplished his task, and how from his capital at Winchester he established law and order in England, is recorded in the histories. We are dealing here with literature, and in this field Alfred is distinguished in two ways: first, by his preservation of early English poetry; and second, by his own writing, which earned for him the title of father of English prose. Finding that some fragments of poetry had escaped the fire of the Danes, he caused search to be made for old manuscripts, and had copies made of all that were legible.<sup>1</sup> But what gave Alfred deepest concern was that in all his kingdom there were few priests and no laymen who could read or write their own language. As he wrote sadly:

" King Alfred sends greeting to Bishop Werfrith in words of love and friendship. Let it be known to thee that it often comes to my mind what wise men and what happy times were formerly in England. . . . I remember what I saw before England had been ravaged and burned, how churches throughout the whole land were filled with treasures of books. And there was also a multitude of God's servants, but these had no knowledge of the books: they could not understand them because they were not written in their own language. It was as if the books said, 'Our fathers who once occupied these places loved wisdom, and through it they obtained wealth and left it to us. We see here their footprints, but we cannot follow them, and therefore have we lost both their wealth and their wisdom, because we would not incline our hearts to their example.' When I remember this, I marvel that good and wise men who were formerly in England, and who had learned these books, did not translate them into their own language. Then I answered myself and said, 'They never thought that their children would be so careless, or that learning would so decay.'"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These copies were made in Alfred's dialect (West Saxon) not in the Northumbrian dialect in which they were first written.

<sup>2</sup> A free version of part of Alfred's preface to his translation of Pope Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis*, which appeared in English as the *Hirdeboe* or *Shepherd's Book*.

To remedy the evil, Alfred ordered that every freeborn Englishman should learn to read and write his own language; but before he announced the order he followed it himself. Rather late in his boyhood he had learned to spell out an English book; now with immense difficulty he took up Latin, and translated the best works for the benefit of his people. His last notable work was the famous *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

At that time it was customary in monasteries to keep a record of events which seemed to the monks of special importance, such as the coming of a bishop, the death of a king, an eclipse of the moon, a battle with the Danes. Alfred found such a record at Winchester, rewrote it (or else caused it to be rewritten) with numerous additions from Bede's History and other sources, and so made a fairly complete chronicle of England. This was sent to other monasteries, where it was copied and enlarged, so that several different versions have come down to us. The work thus begun was continued after Alfred's death, until 1154, and is the oldest contemporary history possessed by any modern nation in its own language.

#### ANGLO-NORMAN OR MIDDLE-ENGLISH PERIOD (1066-1350)

**Specimens of the Language.** A glance at the following selections will show how Anglo-Saxon was slowly approaching our English speech of to-day. The first is from a religious book called *Ancren Riwle* (Rule of the Anchoresses, *cir.* 1225). The second, written about a century later, is from the riming chronicle, or verse history, of Robert Manning or Robert of Brunne. In it we note the appearance of rime, a new thing in English poetry, borrowed from the French, and also a few words, such as "solace," which are of foreign origin:

"Hwoso hevide iseid to Eve, theo heo werp hire eien therone, 'A! wend te awei; thu worpest eien o thi death!' hwat heved heo ionswered? 'Me leove sire, ther havest wouh. Hwarof kalenges tu me? The eppel that ich loke on is forbode me to etene, and nout forto biholden.'"

"Whoso had said (or, if anyone had said) to Eve when she cast her eye theron (i.e. on the apple) 'Ah! turn thou away; thou castest eyes on thy death!' what would she have answered? 'My dear sir, thou art wrong. Of what blamest thou me? The apple which I look upon is forbidden me to eat, not to behold.'"

Lordynges that be now here,  
 If ye wille listene and lere<sup>1</sup>  
 All the story of Inglande,  
 Als Robert Mannynge wryten it fand,  
 And on Inglysch has it schewed,  
 Not for the lered<sup>2</sup> but for the lewed,<sup>3</sup>  
 For tho that on this land wonn<sup>4</sup>  
 That ne Latin ne Frankys conn,<sup>5</sup>  
 For to hauf solace and gamen  
 In felauschip when they sitt samen;<sup>6</sup>  
 And it is wisdom for to wytten<sup>7</sup>  
 The state of the land, and haf it wryten.

**The Norman Conquest.** For a century after the Norman conquest native poetry disappeared from England, as a river may sink into the earth to reappear elsewhere with added volume and new characteristics. During all this time French was the language not only of literature but of society and business; and if anyone had declared at the beginning of the twelfth century, when Norman institutions were firmly established in England, that the time was approaching



DOMESDAY BOOK

From a facsimile edition published in 1862. The volumes, two in number, were kept in the chest here shown

when the conquerors would forget their fatherland and their mother tongue, he would surely have been called dreamer or madman. Yet the unexpected was precisely what happened, and the Norman conquest is remarkable alike for what it did and for what it failed to do.

<sup>1</sup> learn.

<sup>2</sup> learned.

<sup>3</sup> simple or ignorant.

<sup>4</sup> those that dwell.

<sup>5</sup> That neither Latin nor French know.

<sup>6</sup> together.

<sup>7</sup> know.

It accomplished, first, the nationalization of England, uniting the petty Saxon earldoms into one powerful kingdom; and second, it brought into English life, grown sad and stern, like a man without hope, the spirit of youth, of enthusiasm, of eager adventure after the unknown,—in a word, the spirit of romance, which is but another name for that quest of some Holy Grail in which youth is forever engaged.

**Norman Literature.** One who reads the literature that the conquerors brought to England must be struck by the contrast between the Anglo-Saxon and the Norman-French spirit. For example, here is the death of a national hero as portrayed in *The Song of Roland*, an old French epic, which the Normans first put into polished verse:

Li quens Rollans se jut desuz un pin,  
Envers Espaigne en ad turnet son vis,  
De plusurs choses a remembrer le prist. . . .

"Then Roland placed himself beneath a pine tree. Towards Spain he turned his face. Of many things took he remembrance: of various lands where he had made conquests; of sweet France and his kindred; of Charlemagne, his feudal lord, who had nurtured him. He could not refrain from sighs and tears; neither could he forget himself in need. He confessed his sins and besought the Lord's mercy. He raised his right glove and offered it to God; Saint Gabriel from his hand received the offering. Then upon his breast he bowed his head; he joined his hands and went to his end. God sent down his cherubim, and Saint Michael who delivers from peril. Together with Saint Gabriel they departed, bearing the Count's soul to Paradise."

We have not put Roland's ceremonious exit into rime and meter; neither do we offer any criticism of a scene in which the death of a national hero stirs no interest or emotion, not even with the help of Gabriel and the cherubim. One is reminded by contrast of Scyld, who fares forth alone in his Viking ship to meet the mystery of death; or of that last scene of human grief and grandeur in *Beowulf* where a few thanes bury their dead chief on a headland by the gray sea, riding their war steeds around the memorial mound with a chant of sorrow and victory.

The contrast is even more marked in the mass of Norman literature: in romances of the maidens that sink underground in autumn, to reappear as flowers in spring; of Alexander's journey to the bottom of the sea in a crystal barrel, to view the mermaids and monsters; of Guy of Warwick, who slew the giant Colbrant and overthrew all the

knights of Europe, just to win a smile from his Felice; of that other hero who had offended his lady by forgetting one of the commandments of love, and who vowed to fill a barrel with his tears, and did it. The Saxons were as serious in speech as in action, and their poetry is a true reflection of their daily life; but the Normans, brave and resourceful as they were in war and statesmanship, turned to literature for amusement, and indulged their lively fancy in fables, satires, garulous romances, like children reveling in the lore of elves and fairies. As the prattle of a child was the power that awakened Silas Marner from his stupor of despair, so this Norman element of gayety, of exuberant romanticism, was precisely what was needed to rouse the sterner Saxon mind from its gloom and lethargy.

**The New Nation.** So much, then, the Normans accomplished: they brought nationality into English life, and romance into English literature. Without essentially changing the Saxon spirit they enlarged its thought, aroused its hope, gave it wider horizons. They bound England with their laws, covered it with their feudal institutions,



THE NORMAN STAIR, CANTERBURY  
CATHEDRAL

filled it with their ideas and their language; then, as an anticlimax, they disappeared from English history, and their institutions were modified to suit the Saxon temperament. The race conquered in war became in peace the conquerors. The Normans speedily forgot France, and even warred against it. They began to speak English, dropping its cumbersome Teutonic inflections, and adding to it the wealth of their own fine language. They ended by adopting England as their country, and glorifying it above all others. "There is no land in the world," writes a poet of the thirteenth century, "where so many good kings and saints have lived as in the isle of the English. Some were holy martyrs who died cheerfully for God; others had strength or courage like to that of Arthur, Edmund and Cnut."

This poet, who was a Norman monk at Westminster Abbey, wrote about the glories of England in the French language, and celebrated as the national heroes a Celt, a Saxon and a Dane.<sup>1</sup>

So in the space of two centuries a new nation had arisen, combining the best elements of the Anglo-Saxon and Norman-French people, with a considerable mixture of Celtic and Danish elements. Out of the union of these races and tongues came modern English life and letters.

**Geoffrey and the Legends of Arthur.** Geoffrey of Monmouth was a Welshman, familiar from his youth with Celtic legends; also he was a monk who knew how to write Latin; and the combination was a fortunate one, as we shall see.

Long before Geoffrey produced his celebrated History (*cir. 1150*), many stories of the Welsh hero Arthur<sup>2</sup> were current in Britain and on the Continent; but they were never written because of a custom of the Middle Ages which required that, before a legend could be recorded, it must have the authority of some Latin manuscript. Geoffrey undertook to supply such authority in his *Historia regum britanniae*, or History of the Kings of Britain, in which he proved Arthur's descent from Roman ancestors.<sup>3</sup> He quoted liberally from an ancient manuscript which, he alleged, established Arthur's lineage, but which he did not show to others. A storm instantly arose among the writers of that day, most of whom

<sup>1</sup> The significance of this old poem was pointed out by Jusserand, *Literary History of the English People*, Vol. I, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> Who Arthur was has never been determined. There was probably a chieftain of that name who was active in opposing the Anglo-Saxon invaders of Britain, about the year 500; but Gildas, who wrote a Chronicle of Britain only half a century later, does not mention him; neither does Bede, who made study of all available records before writing his History. William of Malmesbury, a chronicler of the twelfth century, refers to "the warlike Arthur of whom the Britons tell so many extravagant fables, a man to be celebrated not in idle tales but in true history." He adds that there were two Arthurs, one a Welsh war-chief (not a king), and the other a myth or fairy creation. This, then, may be the truth of the matter, that a real Arthur, who made a deep impression on the Celtic imagination, was soon hidden in a mass of spurious legends. That Bede had heard these legends is almost certain; that he did not mention them is probably due to the fact that he considered Arthur to be wholly mythical.

<sup>3</sup> After the landing of the Romans in Britain a curious mingling of traditions took place, and in Geoffrey's time native Britons considered themselves as children of Brutus of Rome, and therefore as grandchildren of Æneas of Troy.

denounced Geoffrey's Latin manuscript as a myth, and his History as a shameless invention. But he had shrewdly anticipated such criticism, and issued this warning to the historians, which is solemn or humorous according to your point of view :

" I forbid William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon to speak of the kings of Britain, since they have not seen the book which Walter Archdeacon of Oxford [who was dead, of course] brought out of Brittany."

It is commonly believed that Geoffrey was an impostor, but in such matters one should be wary of passing judgment. Many records of men, cities, empires, have suddenly arisen from the tombs to put to shame the scientists who had denied their existence ; and it is possible that Geoffrey had seen one of the legion of lost manuscripts. The one thing certain is, that if he had any authority for his History he embellished the same freely from popular legends or from his own imagination, as was customary at that time.

His work made a sensation. A score of French poets seized upon his Arthurian legends and wove them into romances, **Arthurian Romances** each adding freely to Geoffrey's narrative. The poet Wace added the tale of the Round Table, and another poet (Walter Map, perhaps) began a cycle of stories concerning Galahad and the quest of the Holy Grail.<sup>1</sup>

The origin of these Arthurian romances, which reappear so often in English poetry, is forever shrouded in mystery. The point to remember is, that we owe them all to the genius of the native Celts ; that it was Geoffrey of Monmouth who first wrote them in Latin prose, and so preserved a treasure which else had been lost ; and that it was the French *trouvéres*, or poets, who completed the various cycles of romances which were later collected in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*.

**Types of Middle-English Literature.** It has long been customary to begin the study of English literature with Chaucer ;

<sup>1</sup> The Holy Grail, or San Graal, or Sangreal, was represented as the cup from which Christ drank with his disciples at the Last Supper. Legend said that the sacred cup had been brought to England, and Arthur's knights undertook, as the most compelling of all duties, to search until they found it.

but that does not mean that he invented any new form of poetry or prose. To examine any collection of our early literature, such as Cook's *Middle-English Reader*, is to discover that many literary types were flourishing in Chaucer's day, and that some of these had grown old-fashioned before he began to use them.

In the thirteenth century, for example, the favorite type of literature in England was the metrical romance, which was introduced by the French poets, and written at first in the French language. The typical romance was a rambling story dealing with the three subjects of love, chivalry and religion; it was filled with adventures among giants, dragons, enchanted castles; and in that day romance was not romance unless liberally supplied with magic and miracle. There were hundreds of such wonder-stories, arranged loosely in three main groups: the so-called "matter of Rome" dealt with the fall of Troy in one part, and with the marvelous adventures of Alexander in the other; the "matter of France" celebrated the heroism of Charlemagne and his Paladins; and the "matter of Britain" wove the magic web of romance around Arthur and his knights of the Round Table.

One of the best of the metrical romances is "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," which may be read as a measure of all the rest. If, as is commonly believed, the unknown author of "Sir Gawain" wrote also "The Pearl" (a beautiful old elegy, or poem of grief, which immortalizes a father's love for his little girl), he was the greatest poet of the early Middle-English period. Unfortunately for us, he wrote not in the king's English or speech of London (which became modern English) but in a different dialect, and his poems should be read in a present-day version; else will the beauty of his work be lost in our effort to understand his language.

Other types of early literature are the riming chronicles or verse histories (such as Layamon's *Brut*, a famous poem, in which the Arthurian legends appear as part of English history),

stories of travel, translations, religious poems, books of devotion, miracle plays, fables, satires, ballads, hymns, lullabies, lyrics of love and nature,—an astonishing collection for so ancient a time, indicative at once of our changing standards of poetry and of our unchanging human nature. For the feelings which inspired or gave welcome to these poems, some five or six hundred years ago, are precisely the same feelings which warm the heart of a poet and his readers to-day. There is nothing ancient but the spelling in this exquisite Lullaby, for instance, which was sung on Christmas eve :

He cam also stytte  
 Ther his moder was  
 As dew in Apryll  
 That fallyt on the gras;  
 He cam also stytte  
 To his moderes bowr  
 As dew in Apryll  
 That fallyt on the flour;  
 He cam also stytte  
 Ther his moder lay  
 As dew in Apryll  
 That fallyt on the spray.<sup>1</sup>

Or witness this other fragment from an old love song, which reflects the feeling of one who "would fain make some mirth" but who finds his heart sad within him :

Now wold I fayne som myrthis make  
 All oneli for my ladys sake,  
 When I hir se;  
 But now I am so ferre from hir  
 Hit will nat be.

Thogh I be long out of hir sight,  
 I am hir man both day and night,  
 And so will be;  
 Wherfor, wold God as I love hir  
 That she lovd me !

<sup>1</sup> In reading this beautiful old lullaby the *e* in "stytte" and "Apryll" should be lightly sounded, like *a* in "China."

When she is mery, then I am glad;  
 When she is sory, then am I sad,  
 And causë whi:  
 For he livith nat that lovith hir  
 So well as I.

She sayth that she hath seen hit wreten  
 That 'seldyn seen is soon foryeten.'  
 Hit is nat so;  
 For in good feith, save oneli hir,  
 I love no moo.

Wherfor I pray, both night and day,  
 That she may cast al care away,  
 And leve in rest  
 That evermo, where'er she be,  
 I love hir best;

And I to hir for to be trew,  
 And never chaunge her for noon new  
 Unto myne ende;  
 And that I may in hir servise  
 For evyr amend.<sup>1</sup>

**Summary of Beginnings.** The two main branches of our literature are the Anglo-Saxon and the Norman-French, both of which received some additions from Celtic, Danish and Roman sources. The Anglo-Saxon literature came to England with the invasion of Teutonic tribes, the Angles, Saxons and Jutes (*cir.* 449). The Norman-French literature appeared after the Norman conquest of England, which began with the Battle of Hastings in 1066.

The Anglo-Saxon literature is classified under two heads, pagan and Christian. The extant fragments of pagan literature include one epic or heroic poem, *Beowulf*, and several lyrics and battle songs, such as "Widsith," "Dcor's Lament," "The Seafarer," "The Battle of Brunanburh" and "The Battle of Maldon." All these were written at an unknown date, and by unknown poets.

The best Christian literature of the period was written in the Northumbrian and the West-Saxon schools. The greatest names of the

<sup>1</sup> The two poems quoted above hardly belong to the Norman-French period proper, but rather to a time when the Anglo-Saxon had assimilated the French element, with its language and verse forms. They were written, probably, in the age of Chaucer, or in what is now called the Late Middle-English period.

Northumbrian school are Bede, Cædmon and Cynewulf. The most famous of the Wessex writers is Alfred the Great, who is called "the father of English prose."

The Normans were originally Northmen, or sea rovers from Scandinavia, who settled in northern France and adopted the Franco-Latin language and civilization. With their conquest of England, in the eleventh century, they brought nationality into English life, and the spirit of romance into English literature. Their stories in prose or verse were extremely fanciful, in marked contrast with the stern, somber poetry of the Anglo-Saxons.

The most notable works of the Norman-French period are: Geoffrey's *History of the Kings of Britain*, which preserved in Latin prose the native legends of King Arthur; Layamon's *Brut*, a riming chronicle or verse history in the native tongue; many metrical romances, or stories of love, chivalry, magic and religion; and various popular songs and ballads. The greatest poet of the period is the unknown author of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" (a metrical romance) and probably also of "The Pearl," a beautiful elegy, which is our earliest *In Memoriam*.

**Selections for Reading.** Without special study of Old English it is impossible to read our earliest literature. The beginner may, however, enter into the spirit of that literature by means of various modern versions, such as the following:

*Beowulf.* Garnett's *Beowulf* (Ginn and Company), a literal translation, is useful to those who study Anglo-Saxon, but is not very readable. The same may be said of Gummere's *The Oldest English Epic*, which follows the verse form of the original. Two of the best versions for the beginner are Child's *Beowulf*, in *Riverside Literature Series* (Houghton), and Earle's *The Deeds of Beowulf* (Clarendon Press).

*Anglo-Saxon Poetry.* The Seafarer, The Wanderer, The Husband's Message (or Love Letter), Deor's Lament, Riddles, Battle of Brunanburh, selections from The Christ, Andreas, Elene, Vision of the Rood, and The Phoenix,—all these are found in an excellent little volume, Cook and Tinker, *Translations from Old English Poetry* (Ginn and Company).

*Anglo-Saxon Prose.* Good selections in Cook and Tinker, *Translations from Old English Prose* (Ginn and Company). Bede's History, translated in *Everyman's Library* (Dutton) and in the *Bohn Library* (Macmillan). In the same volume of the *Bohn Library* is a translation of The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Alfred's Orosius (with stories of early exploration) translated in Pauli's *Life of Alfred*.

*Norman-French Period.* Selections in Manly, *English Poetry, and English Prose* (Ginn and Company); also in Morris and Skeat, *Specimens of Early English* (Clarendon Press). The Song of Roland in *Riverside Literature Series*, and in King's *Classics*. Selected metrical romances in Ellis, *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances* (Bohn Library);

also in Morley, *Early English Prose Romances*, and in Carisbrooke Library Series. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, modernized by Weston, in Arthurian Romances Series. Andrew Lang, *Aucassin and Nicolette* (Crowell). The Pearl, translated by Jewett (Crowell), and by Weir Mitchell (Century). Selections from Layamon's Brut in Morley, *English Writers*, Vol. III. Geoffrey's History in Everyman's Library, and in King's Classics. The Arthurian legends in *The Mabinogion* (Everyman's Library); also in Sidney Lanier's *The Boy's King Arthur* and *The Boy's Mabinogion* (Scribner). A good single volume containing the best of Middle-English literature, with notes, is Cook, *A Literary Middle-English Reader* (Ginn and Company).

**Bibliography.** For extended works covering the entire field of English history and literature, and for a list of the best anthologies, school texts, etc., see the General Bibliography. The following works are of special interest in studying early English literature.

**History.** Allen, *Anglo-Saxon Britain*; Turner, *History of the Anglo-Saxons*; Ramsay, *The Foundations of England*; Freeman, *Old English History*; Cook, *Life of Alfred*; Freeman, *Short History of the Norman Conquest*; Jewett, *Story of the Normans*, in *Stories of the Nations*.

**Literature.** Brooke, *History of Early English Literature*; Jusserand, *Literary History of the English People*, Vol. I; Ten Brink, *English Literature*, Vol. I; Lewis, *Beginnings of English Literature*; Schofield, *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer*; Brother Azarias, *Development of Old-English Thought*; Mitchell, *From Celt to Tudor*; Newell, *King Arthur and the Round Table*. A more advanced work on Arthur is Rhys, *Studies in the Arthurian Legends*.

**Fiction and Poetry.** Kingsley, *Hereward the Wake*; Lytton, *Harold Last of the Saxon Kings*; Scott, *Ivanhoe*; Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hill*; Jane Porter, *Scottish Chiefs*; Shakespeare, *King John*; Tennyson, *Becket*, and *The Idylls of the King*; Gray, *The Bard*; Bates and Coman, *English History Told by English Poets*.

## CHAPTER III

### THE AGE OF CHAUCER AND THE REVIVAL OF LEARNING (1350-1550)

For out of oldē feldēs, as men seith,  
Cometh al this newē corn fro yeer te yere;  
And out of oldē bokēs, in good feith,  
Cometh all this newē science that men lere.

Chaucer, "Parliament of Foules"

**Specimens of the Language.** Our first selection, from *Piers Plowman* (cir. 1362), is the satire of Belling the Cat. The language is that of the common people, and the verse is in the old Saxon manner, with accent and alliteration. The scene is a council of rats and mice (common people) called to consider how best to deal with the cat (court), and it satirizes the popular agitators who declaim against the government. The speaker is a rat, "a raton of renon, most renable of tonge" :

"I have y-seen segges," quod he,	"I have seen creatures" (dogs),
"in the cite of London	quoth he,
Beren beighes ful brighte	"in the city of London
abouten here nekkes. . . .	Bearing collars full bright
Were there a belle on here beighē,	around their necks. . . .
certes, as me thynketh,	Were there a bell on those collars,
Men myghte wite where thei went,	assuredly, in my opinion,
and awei renne!	One might know where the dogs go,
And right so," quod this raton,	and run away from them!
" reson me sheweth	And right so," quoth this rat,
To bugge a belle of brassē	" reason suggests to me
or of brighte sylver,	To buy a bell of brass
And knitten on a colere	or of bright silver,
for owre comune profit,	And tie it on a collar
And hangen it upon the cattes hals;	for our common profit,
than hear we mowen	And hang it on the cat's neck;
	in order that we may hear

Where he ritt or rest  
or renneth to playe." . . .  
Alle this route of ratones  
to this reson thei assented;  
Ac tho the belle was y-bought  
and on the beigne hanged,  
Ther ne was ratoun in alle the route,  
for alle the rewme of Fraunce,  
That dorst have y-bounden the belle  
aboute the cattis nekke.

Where he rides or rests  
or runneth to play." . . .  
All this rout (crowd) of rats  
to this reasoning assented;  
But when the bell was bought  
and hanged on the collar,  
There was not a rat in the crowd  
that, for all the realm of France  
Would have dared to bind the bell  
about the cat's neck.

The second selection is from Chaucer's "Wife of Bath's Tale" (*cir. 1375*). It was written "in the French manner" with rime and meter, for the upper classes, and shows the difference between literary English and the speech of the common people :

In th' olde dayës of the Kyng Arthour,  
Of which that Britons speken greet honour,  
Al was this land fulfild of fayerye.  
The elf-queene with her joly compayne  
Dauncëd ful ofte in many a grenë mede;  
This was the olde opinion, as I rede.  
I speke of manye hundred yeres ago;  
But now kan no man see none elvës mo.

The next two selections (written *cir. 1450*) show how rapidly the language was approaching modern English. The prose, from Malory's *Morte d' Arthur*, is the selection that Tennyson closely followed in his "Passing of Arthur." The poetry, from the ballad of "Robin Hood and the Monk," is probably a fifteenth-century version of a much older English song :

"Therefore,' sayd Arthur unto Syr Bedwere, 'take thou Excalibur my good swerde, and goo with it to yonder water syde, and whan thou comest there I charge the throwe my swerde in that water, and come ageyn and telle me what thou there seest.'

"My lord,' sayd Bedwere, 'your commaundement shal be doon, and lyghtly bryngye you worde ageyn.'

"So Syr Bedwere departed; and by the waye he behelde that noble swerde, that the pomel and the hafte was al of precyous stones; and thenne he sayd to hym self, 'Yf I throwe this ryche swerde in the water, thereof shal never come good, but harme and losse.' And thenne Syr Bedwere hydde Excalibur under a tree."

In somer, when the shawes be sheyne,  
And leves be large and long,  
Hit is full mery in feyr foreste  
To here the foulys song :

To se the dere draw to the dale,  
And leve the hillēs hee,  
And shadow hem in the levēs grene,  
Under the grene-wode tre.

**Historical Outline.** The history of England during this period is largely a record of strife and confusion. The struggle of the House of Commons against the despotism of kings; the Hundred Years War with France, in which those whose fathers had been Celts, Danes, Saxons, Normans, were now fighting shoulder to shoulder as Englishmen all; the suffering of the common people, resulting in the Peasant Rebellion; the barbarity of the nobles, who were destroying one another in the Wars of the Roses; the beginning of commerce and manufacturing, following the lead of Holland, and the rise of a powerful middle class; the belated appearance of the Renaissance, welcomed by a few scholars but unnoticed by the masses of people, who remained in dense ignorance,—even such a brief catalogue suggests that many books must be read before we can enter into the spirit of fourteenth-century England. We shall note here only two circumstances, which may help us to understand Chaucer and the age in which he lived.

The first is that the age of Chaucer, if examined carefully, shows many striking resemblances to our own. It was, for example, an age of warfare; and, as in our own age of hideous inventions, military methods were all upset by the discovery that the foot soldier with his blunderbuss was more potent than the panoplied knight on horseback. While war raged abroad, there was no end of labor troubles at home, strikes, "lockouts," assaults on imported workmen (the Flemish weavers brought in by Edward III), and no end of experimental laws to remedy the evil. The Turk came into Europe, introducing the Eastern and the Balkan questions, which have ever since troubled us. Imperialism was rampant, in Edward's claim to France, for example, or in John of Gaunt's attempt to annex Castile. Even "feminism" was in the air, and its merits were shrewdly debated by Chaucer's Wife of Bath and his Clerk of Oxenford. A dozen other "modern" examples might be given, but the sum of the

matter is this: that there is hardly a social or political or economic problem of the past fifty years that was not violently agitated in the latter half of the fourteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

A second interesting circumstance is that this medieval age produced two poets, Langland and Chaucer, who were more realistic even than present-day writers in their portrayal of life, and who together gave us such a picture of English society as no other poets have ever equaled. Langland wrote his *Piers Plowman* in the familiar Anglo-Saxon style for the common people, and pictured their life to the letter; while Chaucer wrote his *Canterbury Tales*, a poem shaped after Italian and French models, portraying the holiday side of the middle and upper classes. Langland drew a terrible picture of a degraded land, desperately in need of justice, of education, of reform in church and state; Chaucer showed a gay company of pilgrims riding through a prosperous country which he called his "Merrie England." Perhaps the one thing in common with these two poets, the early types of Puritan and Cavalier, was their attitude towards democracy. Langland preached the gospel of labor, far more powerfully than Carlyle ever preached it, and exalted honest work as the patent of nobility. Chaucer, writing for the court, mingled his characters in the most democratic kind of fellowship and, though a knight rode at the head of his procession, put into the mouth of the Wife of Bath his definition of a gentleman:

Loke who that is most vertuous alway,  
Privee and apert,<sup>2</sup> and most entendeth aye  
To do the gentle dedës that he can,  
And take him for the grettest gentilman.

### GEOFFREY CHAUCER (cir. 1340-1400)

"Of Chaucer truly I know not whether to marvel more, either that he in that misty time could see so clearly, or that we in this clear age walk so stumblingly after him."

(Philip Sidney, cir. 1581)

It was the habit of Old-English chieftains to take their scops with them into battle, to the end that the scop's poem might be true to the outer world of fact as well as to the inner world of ideals. The search for "local color" is, therefore, not the

<sup>1</sup> See Kittredge, *Chaucer and his Poetry* (1915), pp. 2-5.

<sup>2</sup> Secretly and openly.

newest thing in fiction but the oldest thing in poetry. Chaucer, the first in time of our great English poets, was true to this old tradition. He was page, squire, soldier, statesman, diplomat, traveler; and then he was a poet, who portrayed in verse the many-colored life which he knew intimately at first hand.

For example, Chaucer had to describe a tournament, in the *Knight's Tale*; but instead of using his imagination, as other romancers had always done, he drew a vivid picture of one of



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those gorgeous pageants of decaying chivalry with which London diverted the French king, who had been brought prisoner to the city after the victory of the Black Prince at Poitiers. So with his *Tabard Inn*, which is a real English inn, and with his *Pilgrims*, who are real pilgrims; and so with every other scene or character he described. His specialty was human nature, his strong point observation, his method essentially modern. And by "modern" we mean that he portrayed the men and women of his own

day so well, with such sympathy and humor and wisdom, that we recognize and welcome them as friends or neighbors, who are the same in all ages. From this viewpoint Chaucer is more modern than Tennyson or Longfellow.

**Life.** Chaucer's boyhood was spent in London, near Westminster, where the brilliant court of Edward was visible to the favored ones; and near the Thames, where the world's commerce, then beginning to ebb and flow with the tides, might be seen of every man. His father was a vintner, or wine merchant, who had enough influence at court

to obtain for his son a place in the house of the Princess Elizabeth. Behold then our future poet beginning his knightly training as page to a highborn lady. Presently he accompanied the Black Prince to the French wars, was taken prisoner and ransomed, and on his return entered the second stage of knighthood as esquire or personal attendant to the king. He married a maid of honor related to John of Gaunt, the famous Duke of Lancaster, and at thirty had passed from the rank of merchant into official and aristocratic circles.

The literary work of Chaucer is conveniently, but not accurately, arranged in three different periods. While attached to the court, one of his duties was to entertain the king and his visitors in their leisure. French poems of love and chivalry were then in demand, and of these Chaucer had great store; but English had recently replaced French even at court, and King Edward and Queen Philippa, both patrons of art and letters, encouraged Chaucer to write in his native language. So he made translations of favorite poems into English, and wrote others in imitation of French models. These early works, the least interesting of all, belong to what is called the period of French influence.

Then Chaucer, who had learned the art of silence as well as of speech, was sent abroad on a series of diplomatic missions. In Italy he probably met the poet Petrarch (as we infer from the Prologue to the Clerk's Tale) and became familiar with the works of Dante and Boccaccio. His subsequent poetry shows a decided advance in range and originality, partly because of his own growth, no doubt, and partly because of his better models. This second period, of about fifteen years, is called the time of Italian influence.

In the third or English period Chaucer returned to London and was a busy man of affairs; for at the English court, unlike those of France and Italy, a poet was expected to earn his pension by some useful work, literature being regarded as a recreation. He was in turn comptroller of customs and superintendent of public works; also he was at times well supplied with money, and again, as the political fortunes of his patron John of Gaunt waned, in sore need of the comforts of life. Witness his "Complaint to His Empty Purse," the humor of which evidently touched the king and brought Chaucer another pension.

Two poems of this period are supposed to contain autobiographical material. In the *Legend of Good Women* he says:

And as for me, though that my wit be lytē,  
On bokēs for to rede I me delytē.

Again, in *The House of Fame* he speaks of finding his real life in books after his daily work in the customhouse is ended. Some of the "rekeninges" (itemized accounts of goods and duties) to which he refers are still preserved in Chaucer's handwriting :

For whan thy labour doon al is,  
And hast y-maad thy rekeninges,  
In stede of reste and newē thinges  
Thou gost hoom to thy hous anoon,  
And, also domb as any stoon,  
Thou sittest at another boke  
Til fully dawsēd is thy loke,  
And livest thus as an hermytē,  
Although thine abstinence is lytē.

Such are the scanty facts concerning England's first great poet, the more elaborate biographies being made up chiefly of guesses or doubtful inferences. He died in the year 1400, and was buried in St. Benet's chapel in Westminster Abbey, a place now revered by all lovers of literature as the Poets' Corner.

**On Reading Chaucer.** Said Caxton, who was the first to print Chaucer's poetry, "He writeth no void words, but all his matter is full of high and quick sentence." Caxton was right, and the modern reader's first aim should be to get the sense of Chaucer rather than his pronunciation. To understand him is not so difficult as appears at first sight, for most of the words that look strange because of their spelling will reveal their meaning to the ear if spoken aloud. Thus the word "leefful" becomes "leveful" or "leaveful" or "permissible."

Next, the reader should remember that Chaucer was a master of versification, and that every stanza of his is musical. At the beginning of a poem, therefore, read a few lines aloud, emphasizing the accented syllables until the rhythm is fixed; then make every line conform to it, and every word keep step to the music. To do this it is necessary to slur certain words and run others together; also, since the mistakes of Chaucer's copyists are repeated in modern editions, it is often necessary to add a helpful word or syllable to a line, or to omit others that are plainly superfluous.

This way of reading Chaucer musically, as one would read any other poet, has three advantages: it is easy, it is pleasant, and it is far more effective than the learning of a hundred specifications laid down by the grammarians.

As for Chaucer's pronunciation, you will not get that accurately without much study, which were better spent on more important **Rules for Reading** matters; so be content with a few rules, which aim simply to help you enjoy the reading. As a general principle, the root vowel of a word was broadly sounded, and the rest slurred over. The characteristic sound of *a* was as in "far"; *e* was sounded like *a*, *i* like *e*, and all diphthongs as broadly as possible,—in "floures" (flowers), for example, which should be pronounced "florës."

Another rule relates to final syllables, and these will appear more interesting if we remember that they represent the dying inflections of nouns and adjectives, which were then declined as in modern German. Final *ed* and *es* are variable, but the rhythm will always tell us whether they should be given an extra syllable or not. So also with final *e*, which is often sounded, but not if the following word begins with a vowel or with *h*. In the latter case the two words may be run together, as in reading Virgil. If a final *e* occurs at the end of a line, it may be lightly pronounced, like *a* in "China," to give added melody to the verse.

Applying these rules, and using our liberty as freely as Chaucer used his,<sup>1</sup> the opening lines of *The Canterbury Tales* would read something like this:

Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote  
*Whan that Apreelē with 'is shoorës sohtë*

The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote,  
*The drooth of March hath paarcëd to the rohtë,*

And bathed every veyne in swich licour,  
*And bahthëd ev'ree vyne in swech lecoor,*

Of which vertu engendred is the flour;  
*Of whech varetu engendred is the floor;*

Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth  
*Whan Zephirus aik with 'is swaite braith*

Inspired hath in every holt and heeth  
*Inspeerëd hath in ev'ree holt and haith*

<sup>1</sup> The language was changing rapidly in Chaucer's day, and there were no printed books to fix a standard. Sometimes Chaucer's grammar and spelling are according to rule, and again as heaven pleases.

The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne  
*The tendre croopēs, and th' yoongē sonnē*

Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,  
*Hath in the Ram 'is hawfē coors ironnē,*

And smale fowles maken melodye,  
*And smawlē foolēs mahken malyodieē,*

That slepen al the night with open ye  
*That slaipen awl the nicht with open eē*

(So priketh hem nature in hir corages)  
*(So priketh 'eem nahtur in hir coorahgēs)*

Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages.  
*Than longen folk to goon on peelgrimahegēs.*

**Early Works of Chaucer.** In his first period, which was dominated by French influence, Chaucer probably translated parts of the *Roman de la Rose*, a dreary allegorical poem in which love is represented as a queen-rose in a garden, surrounded by her court and ministers. In endeavoring to pluck this rose the lover learns the "commandments" and "sacraments" of love, and meets with various adventures at the hands of Virtue, Constancy, and other shadowy personages of less repute. Such allegories were the delight of the Middle Ages; now they are as dust and ashes. Other and better works of this period are *The Book of the Duchess*, an elegy written on the death of Blanche, wife of Chaucer's patron, and various minor poems, such as "Compleynte unto Pitee," the dainty love song "To Rosemunde," and "Truth" or the "Ballad of Good Counsel."

Characteristic works of the second or Italian period are *The House of Fame*, *The Legend of Good Women*, and especially *Troilus and Criseyde*. The last-named, though little known to modern readers, is one of the most remarkable narrative poems in our literature. It began as a retelling of a familiar romance; it ended in an original poem, which might easily be made into a drama or a "modern" novel.

The scene opens in Troy, during the siege of the city by the Greeks. The hero Troilus is a son of Priam, and is second only to the mighty

Hector in warlike deeds. Devoted as he is to glory, he scoffs  
Story of at lovers until the moment when his eye lights on Cressida.

She is a beautiful young widow, and is free to do as she pleases for the moment, her father Calchas having gone over to the Greeks to escape the doom which he sees impending on Troy. Troilus falls desperately in love with Cressida, but she does not know or care, and he is ashamed to speak his mind after scoffing so long at love. Then appears Pandarus, friend of Troilus and uncle to Cressida, who soon learns the secret and brings the young people together. After a long courtship with interminable speeches (as in the old romances) Troilus wins the lady, and all goes happily until Calchas arranges to have his daughter brought to him in exchange for a captured Trojan warrior. The lovers are separated with many tears, but Cressida comforts the despairing Troilus by promising to hoodwink her doting father and return in a few days. Calchas, however, loves his daughter too well to trust her in a city that must soon be given over to plunder, and keeps her safe in the Greek camp. There the handsome young Diomede wins her, and presently Troilus is killed in battle by Achilles.

Such is the old romance of feminine fickleness, which had been written a hundred times before Chaucer took it bodily from Boccaccio. Moreover he humored the old romantic delusion which required that a lover should fall sick in the absence of his mistress, and turn pale or swoon at the sight of her; but he added to the tale many elements not found in the old romances, such as real men and women, humor, pathos, analysis of human motives, and a sense of impending tragedy which comes not from the loss of wealth or happiness but of character. Cressida's final thought of her first lover is intensely pathetic, and a whole chapter of psychology is summed up in the line in which she promises herself to be true to Diomede at the very moment when she is false to Troilus :

" Allas ! of me unto the worldës ende  
Shal neyther ben ywriten nor y-songë  
No good word; for these bookës wol me shende.  
O, rollëd shal I ben on many a tongë !  
Thurghout the world my bellë shal be rongë,  
And wommen moste wol haten me of allë.  
Allas, that swich a cas me sholdë fallë !

"They wol seyn, in-as-much as in me is,  
I have hem doon dishonour, weylawey!  
Al be I not the firste that dide amis,  
What helpeth that to doon my blame awey?  
But since I see ther is no betre wey,  
And that too late is now for me to rewë,  
To Diomede, algate, I wol be trewë."

**The Canterbury Tales.** The plan of gathering a company of people and letting each tell his favorite story has been used by so many poets, ancient and modern, that it is idle to seek the origin of it. Like Topsy, it wasn't born ; it just grew up. Chaucer's plan, however, is more comprehensive than any other in that it includes all classes of society ; it is also more original in that it does not invent heroic characters but takes such men and women as one might meet in any assembly, and shows how typical they are of humanity in all ages. As Lowell says, Chaucer made use in his *Canterbury Tales* of two things that are everywhere regarded as symbols of human life ; namely, the short journey and the inn. We might add, as an indication of Chaucer's philosophy, that his inn is a comfortable one, and that the journey is made in pleasant company and in fair weather.

An outline of Chaucer's great work is as follows. On an evening in springtime the poet comes to Tabard Inn, in Southwark, and finds it filled with a merry company of men and women bent on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Thomas à Becket in Canterbury.

After supper appears the jovial host, Harry Bailey, who finds the company so attractive that he must join it on its pilgrimage. He proposes that, as they shall be long on the way, they shall furnish their own entertainment by telling stories, the best tale to be rewarded by the best of suppers when the pilgrims return from Canterbury. They assent joyfully, and on the morrow begin their journey, cheered by the Knight's Tale as they ride forth under the sunrise. The light of morning and of springtime is upon this work, which is commonly placed at the beginning of modern English literature.

As the journey proceeds we note two distinct parts to Chaucer's record. One part, made up of prologues and interludes, portrays the characters and action of the present comedy ;

the other part, consisting of stories, reflects the comedies and tragedies of long ago. The one shows the perishable side of the men and women of Chaucer's day, their habits, dress, conversation; the other reveals an imperishable world of thought, feeling, ideals, in which these same men and women discover their kinship to humanity. It is possible, since some of the stories are related to each other, that Chaucer meant to arrange the *Canterbury Tales* in dramatic unity, so as to make a huge comedy of human society; but the work as it comes



PILGRIMS SETTING OUT FROM THE "TABARD"

down to us is fragmentary, and no one has discovered the order in which the fragments should be fitted together.

The Prologue is perhaps the best single fragment of the *Canterbury Tales*. In it Chaucer introduces us to the characters of his drama: to the grave Knight and the gay **The Prologue** Squire, the one a model of Chivalry at its best, "a verray parfit gentil knight," the other a young man so full of life and love that "he slept namore than dooth a nightingale"; to the modest Prioress, also, with her pretty clothes, her exquisite manners, her boarding-school accomplishments:

And Frensh she spak ful faire and fetisly,  
After the scole of Stratford attē Bowē,  
For Frensh of Paris was to hir unknowē.

In contrast to this dainty figure is the coarse Wife of Bath, as garrulous as the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. So one character stands to another as shade to light, as they appear in a typical novel of Dickens. The Church, the greatest factor in medieval life, is misrepresented by the hunting Monk and the begging Friar, and is well represented by the Parson, who practiced true religion before he preached it:

But Christës lore and his apostles twelvë  
He taughte, and first he folwëd it himselvë.

Trade is represented by the Merchant, scholarship by the poor Clerk of Oxenford, the professions by the Doctor and the Man-of-law, common folk by the Yeoman, Frankelyn (farmer), Miller and many others of low degree. Prominent among the latter was the Shipman :

Hardy he was, and wys to undertakë;  
With many a tempest hadde his berd been shakë.

From this character, whom Stevenson might have borrowed for his *Treasure Island*, we infer the barbarity that prevailed when commerce was new, when the English sailor was by turns smuggler or pirate, equally ready to sail or scuttle a ship, and to silence any tongue that might tell tales by making its wretched owner "walk the plank." Chaucer's description of the latter process is a masterpiece of piratical humor :

If that he faught and hadde the hyer hond,  
By water he sente hem hoom to every lond.

Some thirty pilgrims appear in the famous Prologue, and as each was to tell two stories on the way to Canterbury, and two   
Variety of Tales more on the return, it is probable that Chaucer contemplated a work of more than a hundred tales. Only four-and-twenty were completed, but these are enough to cover the field of light literature in that day, from the romance of love to the humorous animal fable. Between these are wonder-stories of giants and fairies, satires on the monks,

parodies on literature, and some examples of coarse horseplay for which Chaucer offers an apology, saying that he must let each pilgrim tell his tale in his own way.

A round dozen of these tales may still be read with pleasure; but, as a suggestion of Chaucer's variety, we name only three: the Knight's romance of "Palamon and Arcite," the Nun's Priest's fable of "Chanticleer," and the Clerk's old ballad of "Patient Griselda." The last-named will be more interesting if we remember that the subject of woman's rights had been hurled at the heads of the pilgrims by the Wife of Bath, and that the Clerk told his story to illustrate his different ideal of womanhood.

**The Charm of Chaucer.** The first of Chaucer's qualities is that he is an excellent story-teller; which means that he has a tale to tell, a good method of telling it, and a philosophy of life which gives us something to think about aside from the narrative. He had a profound insight of human nature, and in telling the simplest story was sure to slip in some nugget of wisdom or humor: "What wol nat be mote need be left," "For three may keep counsel if twain be away," "The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne," "Ful wys is he that can himselfen knowe,"

The firste vertue, sone, if thou wilt lere,  
Is to restreine and kepen wel thy tonge.

There are literally hundreds of such "good things" which make Chaucer a constant delight to those who, by a very little practice, can understand him almost as easily as Shakespeare. Moreover he was a careful artist; he knew the principles of poetry and of story-telling, and before he wrote a song or a tale he considered both his subject and his audience, repeating to himself his own rule:

Ther nis no werkman, whatsoever he be.  
That may bothe werkē wel and hastily:  
This wol be doon at leysur, parfitly.

A second quality of Chaucer is his power of observation, a power so extraordinary that, unlike other poets, he did not need to invent scenes or characters but only to describe what he had seen and heard in this wonderful world. As he makes one of his characters say :

For certeynly, he that me made  
To comen hider seydë me :  
I shouldë bothë hear et see  
In this place wonder thingës.

In the *Canterbury Tales* alone he employs more than a score of characters, and hardly a romantic hero among them ; rather does he delight in plain men and women, who reveal their quality not so much in their action as in their dress, manner, or tricks of speech. For Chaucer has the glance of an Indian, which passes over all obvious matters to light upon one significant detail ; and that detail furnishes the name or the adjective of the object. Sometimes his descriptions of men or nature are microscopic in their accuracy, and again in a single line he awakens the reader's imagination, — as when Pandarus (in *Troilus*), in order to make himself unobtrusive in a room where he is not wanted, picks up a manuscript and "makes a face," that is, he pretends to be absorbed in a story,

and fand his countenance  
As for to loke upon an old romance.

A dozen striking examples might be given, but we shall note only one. In the *Book of the Duchess* the poet is in a forest, when a chase sweeps by with whoop of huntsman and clamor of hounds. After the hunt, when the woods are all still, comes a little lost dog :

Hit com and creep to me as lowë  
Right as hit haddë me y-knowë,  
Hild down his heed and jiyned his eres,  
And leyde al smouthë doun his heres.  
I wolde han caught hit, and anoon  
Hit flegdë and was fro me goon.

Next to his power of description, Chaucer's best quality is his humor, a humor which is hard to phrase, since it runs from the keenest wit to the broadest farce, yet is always kindly and human. A mendicant friar comes in out of the cold, glances about the snug kitchen for the best seat:

And fro the bench he droof awey the cat.

Sometimes his humor is delicate, as in touching up the foibles of the Doctor or the Man-of-law, or in the Priest's translation of Chanticleer's evil remark about women:

*In principio  
Mulier est hominis confusio.*

Madame, the sentence of this Latin is:  
Woman is mannës joye and al his blis.

The humor broadens in the Wife of Bath, who tells how she managed several husbands by making their lives miserable; and occasionally it grows a little grim, as when the Maunciple tells the difference between a big and a little rascal. The former does evil on a large scale, and,

Lo ! therfor is he cleped a Capitain ;  
But for the outlawe hath but small meynee,  
And may not doon so gret an harm as he,  
Ne bring a countree to so gret mischeef,  
Men clepen him an outlawe or a theef.

A fourth quality of Chaucer is his broad tolerance, his absolute disinterestedness. He leaves reforms to Wyclif and Langland, and can laugh with the Shipman who turns **Freedom from Bias** smuggler, or with the worldly Monk whose "jingling" bridle keeps others as well as himself from hearing the chapel bell. He will not even criticize the fickle Cressida for deserting Troilus, saying that men tell tales about her, which is punishment enough for any woman. In fine, Chaucer is content to picture a world in which the rain falleth alike upon the just and the unjust, and in which the latter seem to have a liberal share of the umbrellas. He enjoys it all, and describes

its inhabitants as they are, not as he thinks they ought to be. The reader may think that this or that character deserves to come to a bad end ; but not so Chaucer, who regards them all as kindly, as impersonally as Nature herself.

So the Canterbury pilgrims are not simply fourteenth-century Englishmen ; they are human types whom Chaucer met at the Tabard Inn, and whom later English writers discover on all of earth's highways. One appears unchanged in Shakespeare's drama, another in a novel of Jane Austen, a third lives over the way or down the street. From century to century they change not, save in name or dress. The poet who described or created such enduring characters stands among the few who are called universal writers.

#### CHAUCER'S CONTEMPORARIES AND SUCCESSORS

Someone has compared a literary period to a wood in which a few giant oaks lift head and shoulders above many other trees, all nourished by the same soil and air. If we follow this figure, Langland and Wyclif are the only growths that tower beside Chaucer, and Wyclif was a reformer who belongs to English history rather than to literature.

**Langland.** William Langland (*cir.* 1332-1400) is a great figure in obscurity. We are not certain even of his name, and we must search his work to discover that he was, probably, a poor lay-priest whose life was governed by two motives : a passion for the poor, which led him to plead their cause in poetry, and a longing for all knowledge :

All the sciences under sonnë, and all the sotyle craftës,  
I wolde I knew and couthë, kyndely in mynë hertë.

His chief poem, *Piers Plowman* (*cir.* 1362), is a series of visions in which are portrayed the shams and impostures of the age and the misery of the common people. The poem is, therefore, as the heavy shadow which throws into relief the bright picture of the *Canterbury Tales*.

For example, while Chaucer portrays the Tabard Inn with its good cheer and merry company, Langland goes to another inn on the next street; there he looks with pure eyes upon sad or evil-faced men and women, drinking, gaming, quarreling, and pictures a scene of physical and moral degradation. One must look on both pictures to know what an English inn was like in the fourteenth century.

Because of its crude form and dialect *Piers Plowman* is hard to follow; but to the few who have read it and entered into Langland's vision — shared his passion for the poor, his hatred of shams, his belief in the gospel of honest work, his humor and satire and philosophy — it is one of the most powerful and original poems in English literature.<sup>1</sup>

**Malory.** Judged by its influence, the greatest prose work of the fifteenth century was the *Morte d'Arthur* of Thomas Malory (d. 1471). Of the English knight who compiled this work very little is known beyond this, that he sought to preserve in literature the spirit of medieval knighthood and religion. He tells us nothing of this purpose; but Caxton, who received the only known copy of Malory's manuscript and published it in 1485, seems to have reflected the author's spirit in these words:

"I according to my copy have set it in imprint, to the intent that noble men may see and learn the noble acts of chivalry, the gentle and virtuous deeds that some knyghts used in those days, by which they came to honour, and how they that were vicious were punished and put oft to shame and rebuke. . . . For herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, hardness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue and sin. Do after the good, and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame and renommee."

<sup>1</sup> The working classes were beginning to assert themselves in this age, and to proclaim "the rights of man." Witness the followers of John Ball, and his influence over the crowd when he chanted the lines:

When Adam delved and Eve span,  
Who was then the gentleman?

Langland's poem, written in the midst of the labor agitation, was the first glorification of labor to appear in English literature. Those who read it may make an interesting comparison between "*Piers Plowman*" and a modern labor poem, such as Hood's "*Song of the Shirt*" or Markham's "*The Man with the Hoe*."

Malory's spirit is further indicated by the fact that he passed over all extravagant tales of foreign heroes and used only the best of the Arthurian romances.<sup>1</sup> These had been left in a chaotic state by poets, and Malory brought order out of the chaos by omitting tedious fables and arranging his material in something like dramatic unity under three heads: the Coming of Arthur with its glorious promise, the Round Table, and the Search for the Holy Grail:

"And thenne the kynge and al estates wente home unto Camelot, and soo wente to evensonge to the grete mynster, and soo after upon that to



A STREET IN CAERLEON ON USK

The traditional home of King Arthur

souper; and every knyght sette in his owne place as they were to forehand. Thenne anone they herd crakynge and cryenge of thonder, that hem thought the place shold alle to dryve. In the myddes of this blast entred a sonne beaume more clerer by seven tymes than ever they sawe daye, and al they were alighted of the grace of the Holy Ghoost. Then beganne every knyghte to behold other, and eyther sawe other by theire semynge fayrer than ever they sawe afore. Not for thenne there was no knyght myghte speke one word a grete whyle, and soo they loked every man on other, as

<sup>1</sup> For the origin of the Arthurian stories see p. 27. An example of the way these stories were enlarged is given by Lewis, *Beginnings of English Literature*, pp. 73-76, who records the story of Arthur's death as told, first, by Geoffrey, then by Layamon, and finally by Malory, who copied the tale from French sources. If we add Tennyson's "Passing of Arthur," we shall have the story as told from the twelfth to the nineteenth century.

they had ben domb. Thenne ther entred into the halle the Holy Graile, covered with whyte samyte, but ther was none myghte see hit, nor who bare hit. And there was al the halle fulfylled with good odoures, and every knyght had suche metes and drynkes as he best loved in this world. And when the Holy Grayle had be borne thurgh the halle, thenne the holy vessel departed sodenly, that they wiste not where hit becam. . . .

"' Now,' said Sir Gawayne, ' we have ben served this daye of what metes and drynkes we thoughte on, but one thyng begyled us; we myght not see the Holy Grayle, it was soo precuously coverd. Therfor I wil mak here avowe, that to morne, withoute lenger abydyng, I shall laboure in the quest of the Sancgreal; that I shalle hold me oute a twelve moneth and a day, or more yf nede be, and never shalle I retorne ageyne unto the courte tyl I have sene hit more openly than hit hath ben sene here.' . . . Whan they of the Table Round herde Syr Gawayne saye so, they arose up the most party and maade suche avowes as Sire Gawayne had made."

Into this holy quest sin enters like a serpent; then in quick succession tragedy, rebellion, the passing of Arthur, the penitence of guilty Launcelot and Guinevere. The figures fade away at last, as Shelley says of the figures of the Iliad, "in tenderness and inexpiable sorrow."

As the best of Malory's work is now easily accessible, we forbear further quotation. These old Arthurian legends, the common inheritance of all English-speaking people, should be known to every reader. As they appear in *Morte d'Arthur* they are notable as an example of fine old English prose, as a reflection of the enduring ideals of chivalry, and finally as a storehouse in which Spenser, Tennyson and many others have found material for some of their noblest poems.

**Caxton.** William Caxton (d. 1491) is famous for having brought the printing press to England, but he has other claims to literary renown. He was editor as well as printer; he translated more than a score of the books which came from his press; and, finally, it was he who did more than any other man to fix a standard of English speech.

In Caxton's day several dialects were in use, and, as we infer from one of his prefaces, he was doubtful which was most suitable for literature or most likely to become the common

speech of England. His doubt was dissolved by the time he had printed the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Morte d'Arthur*. Many other works followed in the same "King's English"; his successor at the printing press, Wynkyn de Worde, continued in the same line; and when, less than sixty years after the first English book was printed, Tyndale's translation of the New Testament had found its way to every shire in England, there was no longer room for doubt that the East-Midland dialect had become the standard of the English nation. We have been speaking and writing that dialect ever since.

The story of how printing came to England, not as a literary but as a business venture, is a very interesting one. Caxton was an English merchant who had established himself at Bruges, then one of the trading centers of Europe. There his business prospered, and he became governor of the *Domus Angliae*, or House of the English Guild of Merchant Adventurers. There is romance in the very name. With moderate wealth came leisure to Caxton, and he indulged his literary taste by writing his own version of some popular romances concerning the siege of Troy, being encouraged by the English princess Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy, into whose service he had entered.

Copies of his work being in demand, Caxton consulted the professional copyists, whose beautiful work we read about in a remarkable novel called *The Cloister and the Hearth*. Then suddenly came to Bruges the rumor of Gutenberg's discovery of printing from movable



THE ALMONRY, WESTMINSTER

Caxton's printing office. From an old print

types, and Caxton hastened to Germany to investigate the matter, led by the desire to get copies of his own work as cheaply as possible. The discovery fascinated him ; instead of a few copies of his manuscript he brought back to Bruges a press, from which he issued his *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troy* (1474), which was probably the first book to appear in English print. Quick to see the commercial advantages of the new invention, Caxton moved his printing press to London, near Westminster Abbey, where he brought out in 1477 his *Dictes and Sayinges of the Philosophers*, the first book ever printed on English soil.<sup>1</sup>

From the very outset Caxton's venture was successful, and he was soon busy in supplying books that were most in demand. He has been criticized for not printing the classics and other books of the New Learning ; but he evidently knew his business and his audience, and aimed to give people what they wanted, not what he thought they ought to have. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, Mandeville's *Travels*, Æsop's *Fables*, parts of the *Æneid*, translations of French romances, lives of the saints (The Golden Legend), cookbooks, prayer books, books of etiquette, — the list of Caxton's eighty-odd publications becomes significant when we remember that he printed only popular books, and that the titles indicate the taste of the age which first looked upon the marvel of printing.

**Popular Ballads.** If it be asked, "What is a ballad ?" any positive answer will lead to disputation. Originally the ballad was probably a chant to accompany a dance, and so it represents the earliest form of poetry. In theory, as various definitions indicate, it is a short poem telling a story of some exploit, usually of a valorous kind. In common practice, from Chaucer to Tennyson, the ballad is almost any kind of short poem treating of any event, grave or gay, in any descriptive or dramatic way that appeals to the poet.

<sup>1</sup> Another book of Caxton's, *The Game and Playe of the Chesse* (1475) was long accorded this honor, but it is fairly certain that the book on chess-playing was printed in Bruges.

For the origin of the ballad one must search far back among the social customs of primitive times. That the Anglo-Saxons were familiar with it appears from the record of Tacitus, who speaks of their *carmina* or narrative songs; but, with the exception of "The Fight at Finnsburgh" and a few other fragments, all these have disappeared.

During the Middle Ages ballads were constantly appearing among the common people,<sup>1</sup> but they were seldom written, and found no standing in polite literature. In the eighteenth century, however, certain men who had grown weary of the formal poetry of Pope and his school turned for relief to the old vigorous ballads of the people, and rescued them from oblivion. The one book to which, more than any other, we owe the revival of interest in balladry is *Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765).

The best of our ballads date in their present form from the fifteenth or sixteenth century; but the originals were much older, and had been transmitted orally for years before they were recorded on manuscript. As we study them we note, as their first characteristic, that they spring from the unlettered common people, that they are by unknown authors, and that they appear in different versions because they were changed by each minstrel to suit his own taste or that of his audience.

A second characteristic is the objective quality of the ballad, which deals not with a poet's thought or feeling (such subjective emotions give rise to the lyric) but with a man or a deed. See in the ballad of "Sir Patrick Spence" (or Spens) how the unknown author goes straight to his story:

The king sits in Dumferling towne,  
Drinking the blude-red wine :

<sup>1</sup> Thus, when Sidney says, 'I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglass that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet,' and when Shakespeare shows Autolycus at a country fair offering "songs for men and women of all sizes," both poets are referring to popular ballads. Even later, as late as the American Revolution, history was first written for the people in the form of ballads.

" O whar will I get guid sailor  
 To sail this schip of mine? "

Up and spak an eldern knicht,  
 Sat at the king's richt kne:  
 " Sir Patrick Spence is the best sailor  
 That sails upon the se."

There is a brief pause to tell us of Sir Patrick's dismay when word comes that the king expects him to take out a ship at a time when she should be riding to anchor, then on goes the narrative :

" Mak hast, mak haste, my mirry men all,  
 Our guid schip sails the morne."  
 " O say na sae, my master deir,  
 For I feir a deadlie storme:  
  
 " Late, late yestreen I saw the new moone  
 Wi the auld moone in hir arme,  
 And I feir, I feir, my deir master,  
 That we will cum to harme."

At the end there is no wailing, no moral, no display of the poet's feeling, but just a picture :

O lang, lang may the ladies stand,  
 Wi thair gold kems in their hair,  
 Waiting for thair ain deir lords,  
 For they 'll se thame na mair.

Haf owre, haf owre to Aberdour,  
 It 's fiftie fadom deip,  
 And thair lies guid Sir Patrick Spence,  
 Wi the Scots lords at his feit.

Directness, vigor, dramatic action, an ending that appeals to the imagination,—most of the good qualities of story-telling are found in this old Scottish ballad. If we compare it with Longfellow's "Wreck of the Hesperus," we may discover that the two poets, though far apart in time and space, have followed almost identical methods.

Other good ballads, which take us out under the open sky among vigorous men, are certain parts of "The Gest of Robin

Hood," "Mary Hamilton," "The Wife of Usher's Well," "The Wee Wee Man," "Fair Helen," "Hind Horn," "Bonnie George Campbell," "Johnnie O'Cockley's Well," "Catharine Jaffray" (from which Scott borrowed his "Lochinvar"), and especially "The Nutbrown Mayde," sweetest and most artistic of all the ballads, which gives a popular and happy version of the tale that Chaucer told in his "Patient Griselda."

**Summary.** The period included in the Age of Chaucer and the Revival of Learning covers two centuries, from 1350 to 1550. The chief literary figure of the period, and one of the greatest of English poets, is Geoffrey Chaucer, who died in the year 1400. He was greatly influenced by French and Italian models; he wrote for the middle and upper classes; his greatest work was *The Canterbury Tales*.

Langland, another poet contemporary with Chaucer, is famous for his *Piers Plowman*, a powerful poem aiming at social reform, and vividly portraying the life of the common people. It is written in the old Saxon manner, with accent and alliteration, and is difficult to read in its original form.

After the death of Chaucer a century and a half passed before another great writer appeared in England. The time was one of general decline in literature, and the most obvious causes were: the Wars of the Roses, which destroyed many of the patrons of literature; the Reformation, which occupied the nation with religious controversy; and the Renaissance or Revival of Learning, which turned scholars to the literature of Greece and Rome rather than to English works.

In our study of the latter part of the period we reviewed: (1) the rise of the popular ballad, which was almost the only type of literature known to the common people. (2) The work of Malory, who arranged the best of the Arthurian legends in his *Morte d'Arthur*. (3) The work of Caxton, who brought the first printing press to London, and who was instrumental in establishing the East-Midland dialect as the literary language of England.

**Selections for Reading.** Typical selections from all authors of the period are given in Manly, English Poetry, and English Prose; Newcomer and Andrews, Twelve Centuries of English Poetry and Prose; Ward, English Poets; Morris and Skeat, Specimens of Early English.

Chaucer's Prologue, Knight's Tale, and other selections in Riverside Literature, King's Classics, and several other school series. A good single-volume edition of Chaucer's poetry is Skeat, The Student's Chaucer (Clarendon Press). A good, but expensive, modernized version is Tatlock and MacKaye, Modern Reader's Chaucer (Macmillan).

Metrical version of *Piers Plowman*, by Skeat, in King's Classics; modernized prose version by Kate Warren, in Treasury of English Literature (Dodge).

Selections from Malory's *Morte d' Arthur* in Athenæum Press Series (Ginn and Company); also in Camelot Series. An elaborate edition of Malory with introduction by Sommer and an essay by Andrew Lang (3 vols., London, 1891); another with modernized text, introduction by Rhys, illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley (London, 1893).

The best of the old ballads are published in Pocket Classics, and in Maynard's English Classics; a volume of ancient and modern English ballads in Ginn and Company's Classics for Children; Percy's Reliques, in Everyman's Library. Allingham, *The Ballad Book*; Hazlitt, *Popular Poetry of England*; Gummere, *Old English Ballads*; Gayley and Flaherty, *Poetry of the People*; Child, *English and Scottish Popular Poetry* (5 vols.); the last-named work, edited and abridged by Kittredge, in one volume.

**Bibliography.** The following works have been sifted from a much larger number dealing with the age of Chaucer and the Revival of Learning. More extended works, covering the entire field of English history and literature, are listed in the General Bibliography.

**History.** Snell, *the Age of Chaucer*; Jusserand, *Wayfaring Life in the Fourteenth Century*; Jenks, *In the Days of Chaucer*; Trevelyan, *In the Age of Wyclif*; Coulton, *Chaucer and His England*; Denton, *England in the Fifteenth Century*; Green, *Town Life in the Fifteenth Century*; Einstein, *The Italian Renaissance in England*; Froissart, *Chronicles*; Lanier, *The Boy's Froissart*.

**Literature.** Ward, *Life of Chaucer* (English Men of Letters Series); Kittredge, *Chaucer and His Poetry* (Harvard University Press); Pollard, *Chaucer Primer*; Lounsbury, *Studies in Chaucer*; Lowell's essay in *My Study Windows*; essay by Hazlitt, in *Lectures on the English Poets*; Jusserand, *Piers Plowman*; Roper, *Life of Sir Thomas More*.

**Fiction and Poetry.** Lytton, *Last of the Barons*; Yonge, *Lances of Lynwood*; Scott, *Marmion*; Shakespeare, *Richard II*, *Henry IV*, *Richard III*; Bates and Coman, *English History Told by English Poets*.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ELIZABETHAN AGE (1550-1620)

This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,  
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,  
This other Eden, demi-paradise,  
This fortress built by Nature for herself  
Against infection and the hand of war,  
This happy breed of men, this little world,  
This precious stone set in the silver sea, . . .  
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England!

Shakespeare, *King Richard II*

**Historical Background.** In such triumphant lines, falling from the lips of that old imperialist John of Gaunt, did Shakespeare reflect, not the rebellious spirit of the age of Richard II, but the boundless enthusiasm of his own times, when the defeat of Spain's mighty Armada had left England "in splendid isolation," unchallenged mistress of her own realm and of the encircling sea. For it was in the latter part of Elizabeth's reign that England found herself as a nation, and became conscious of her destiny as a world empire.

There is another and darker side to the political shield, but the student of literature is not concerned with it. We are to remember the patriotic enthusiasm of the age, overlooking the frequent despotism of "good Queen Bess" and entering into the spirit of national pride and power that thrilled all classes of Englishmen during her reign, if we are to understand the outburst of Elizabethan literature. Nearly two centuries of trouble and danger had passed since Chaucer died, and no national poet had appeared in England. The Renaissance came, and the Reformation, but they brought no great writers with them. During the first thirty years of Elizabeth's reign not a single important literary work was produced; then suddenly appeared the poetry of Spenser and Chapman, the prose of Hooker, Sidney and Bacon, the dramas of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and a score of others,—all voicing the national feeling after the defeat of the Armada, and growing silent as soon as the enthusiasm began to wane.

**Literary Characteristics.** Next to the patriotic spirit of Elizabethan literature, its most notable qualities are its youthful freshness and vigor, its romantic spirit, its absorption in the theme of love, its extravagance of speech, its lively sense of the wonder of heaven and earth. The ideal beauty of Spenser's poetry, the bombast of Marlowe, the boundless zest of Shakespeare's historical plays, the romantic love celebrated in unnumbered lyrics,—all these speak of youth, of springtime, of the joy and the heroic adventure of human living.

This romantic enthusiasm of Elizabethan poetry and prose may be explained by the fact that, besides the national impulse, three other inspiring influences were at work. The first in point of time was the rediscovery of the classics of Greece and Rome,—beautiful old poems, which were as new to the Elizabethans as to Keats when he wrote his immortal sonnet, beginning :

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold.

The second awakening factor was the widespread interest in nature and the physical sciences, which spurred many another Elizabethan besides Bacon to "take all knowledge for his province." This new interest was generally romantic rather than scientific, was more concerned with marvels, like the philosopher's stone that would transmute all things to gold, than with the simple facts of nature. Bacon's chemical changes, which follow the "instincts" of metals, are almost on a par with those other changes described in Shakespeare's song of Ariel :

Full fathom five thy father lies;  
Of his bones are coral made;  
Those are pearls that were his eyes:  
Nothing of him that doth fade  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange.

The third factor which stimulated the Elizabethan imagination was the discovery of the world beyond the Atlantic, a world of wealth, of beauty, of unmeasured opportunity for

brave spirits, in regions long supposed to be possessed of demons, monsters, Othello's impossible

cannibals that each other eat,  
The anthropophagi, and men whose heads  
Do grow beneath their shoulders.

When Drake returned from his voyage around the world he brought to England two things: a tale of vast regions just over The New  
World the world's rim that awaited English explorers, and a ship loaded to the hatches with gold and jewels.

That the latter treasure was little better than a pirate's booty; that it was stolen from the Spaniards, who had taken it from poor savages at the price of blood and torture, — all this was not mentioned. The queen and her favorites shared the treasure with Drake's buccaneers, and the New World seemed to them a place of barbaric splendor, where the savage's wattled hut was roofed with silver, his garments beaded with all precious jewels. As a popular play of the period declares:

"Why, man, all their dripping pans are pure gold! The prisoners they take are fettered in gold; and as for rubies and diamonds, they goe forth on holydayes and gather 'hem by the seashore to hang on their children's coates."

Before the American settlements opened England's eyes to the stern reality of things, it was the romance of the New World that appealed most powerfully to the imagination, and that influenced Elizabethan literature to an extent which we have not yet begun to measure.

**Foreign Influence.** We shall understand the imitative quality of early Elizabethan poetry if we read it in the light of these facts: that in the sixteenth century England was far behind other European nations in culture; that the Renaissance had influenced Italy and Holland for a century before it crossed the Channel; that, at a time when every Dutch peasant read his Bible, the masses of English people remained in dense ignorance, and the majority of the official classes were like

Shakespeare's father and daughter in that they could neither read nor write. So, when the new national spirit began to express itself in literature, Englishmen turned to the more cultured nations and began to imitate them in poetry, as in dress and manners. Shakespeare gives us a hint of the matter when he makes Portia ridicule the apishness of the English. In *The Merchant of Venice* (Act I, scene 2) the maid Nerissa is speaking of various princely suitors for Portia's hand. She names them over, Frenchman, Italian, Scotsman, German ; but Portia makes fun of them all. The maid tries again :

*Nerissa.* What say you, then, to Falconbridge, the young baron of England?

*Portia.* You know I say nothing to him, for he understands not me, nor I him : he hath neither Latin, French, nor Italian ; and you will come into the court and swear that I have a poor pennyworth in the English. He is a proper man's picture, but, alas, who can converse with a dumb show ? How oddly he is suited ! I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany and his behaviour every where.

When Wyatt and Surrey brought the sonnet to England, they brought also the habit of imitating the Italian poets ; and this habit influenced Spenser and other Elizabethans even more than Chaucer had been influenced by Dante and Petrarch. It was the fashion at that time for Italian gentlemen to write poetry ; they practiced the art as they practiced riding or fencing ; and presently scores of Englishmen followed Sidney's example in taking up this phase of foreign education. It was also an Italian custom to publish the works of amateur poets in the form of anthologies, and soon there appeared in England *The Paradise of Dainty Devices*, *A Gorgeouſe Gallerie of Gallant Inventions* and other such collections, the best of which was *England's Helicon* (1600). Still another foreign fashion was that of writing a series of sonnets to some real or imaginary mistress ; and that the fashion was followed in England is evident from Spenser's *Amoretti*, Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, and other less-famous effusions.

## SPENSER AND THE LYRIC POETS

**Lyrics of Love.** Love was the subject of a very large part of the minor poems of the period, the monotony being relieved

by an occasional ballad, such as Drayton's "Battle of Agincourt" and his "Ode to the Virginian Voyage," the latter being one of the first poems inspired by the New World. Since love was still subject to literary rules, as in the metrical romances, it is not strange that most Elizabethan lyrics seem to the modern reader artificial. They deal largely with goddesses and airy shepherd folk; they contain many references to classic characters and scenes, to Venus, Olympus and the rest; they are nearly



MICHAEL DRAYTON

all characterized by extravagance of language. A single selection, "Apelles' Song" by Lyl, may serve as typical of the more fantastic love lyrics :

Cupid and my Campaspe played  
 At cards for kisses; Cupid paid.  
 He stakes his quiver, bow and arrows,  
 His mother's doves and team of sparrows:  
 Loses them too; then down he throws  
 The coral of his lip, the rose  
 Growing on 's cheek (but none knows how);  
 With these the crystal of his brow,  
 And then the dimple of his chin.  
 All these did my Campaspe win.  
 At last he set her both his eyes;  
 She won, and Cupid blind did rise.  
 O Love, has she done this to thee?  
 What shall, alas! become of me?

**Music and Poetry.** Another reason for the outburst of lyric poetry in Elizabethan times was that choral music began to be studied, and there was great demand for new songs. Then appeared a theory of the close relation between poetry and music, which was followed by the American poet Lanier more than two centuries later.<sup>1</sup> This interesting theory is foreshadowed in several minor works of the period; for example, in Barnfield's sonnet "To R. L.," beginning :

If music and sweet poetry agree,  
As they must needs, the sister and the brother,  
Then must the love be great 'twixt thee and me,  
Because thou lov'st the one, and I the other.

The stage caught up the new fashion, and hundreds of lyrics appeared in the Elizabethan drama, such as Dekker's "Content" (from the play of *Patient Grissell*), which almost sets itself to music as we read it :

Art thou poor, yet hast thou golden slumbers?  
O sweet content!  
Art thou rich, yet is thy mind perplexed?  
O punishment!  
Dost laugh to see how fools are vexed  
To add to golden numbers golden numbers?  
O sweet content, O sweet, O sweet content!

*Work apace, apace, apace, apace!*  
*Honest labour bears a lovely face.*  
*Then hey noney, noney; hey noney, noney!*

Canst drink the waters of the crispéd spring?  
O sweet content!  
Swim'st thou in wealth, yet sink'st in thine own tears?  
O punishment!  
Then he that patiently want's burden bears  
No burden bears, but is a king, a king.  
O sweet content, O sweet, O sweet content!

<sup>1</sup> Much of Lanier's verse seems more like a musical improvisation than like an ordinary poem. His theory that music and poetry are subject to the same laws is developed in his *Science of English Verse*. It is interesting to note that Lanier's ancestors were musical directors at the courts of Elizabeth and of James I.

So many lyric poets appeared during this period that we cannot here classify them; and it would be idle to list their names. The best place to make acquaintance with them is not in a dry history of literature, but in such a pleasant little book as Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, where their best work is accessible to every reader.

### EDMUND SPENSER (1552-1599)

Spenser was the second of the great English poets, and it is but natural to compare him with Chaucer, who was the first. In respect of time nearly two centuries separate these elder poets; in all other respects, in aims, ideals, methods, they are as far apart as two men of the same race can well be.

**Life.** Very little is known of Spenser; he appears in the light, then vanishes into the shadow, like his Arthur of *The Faery Queen*. We see him for a moment in the midst of rebellion in Ireland, or engaged in the scramble for preferment among the queen's favorites; he disappears, and from his obscurity comes a poem that is like the distant ringing of a chapel bell, faintly heard in the clatter of the city streets. We shall try here to understand this poet by dissolving some of the mystery that envelops him.

He was born in London, and spent his youth amid the political and religious dissensions of the times of Mary and Elizabeth. For all this turmoil Spenser had no stomach; he was a man of peace, of books, of romantic dreams. He was of noble family, but poor; his only talent was to write poetry, and as poetry would not buy much bread in those days, his pride of birth was humbled in seeking the patronage of nobles:

Full little knowest thou, that hast not tried,  
What hell it is in suing long to bide: . . .  
To fawn, to crouch, to wait, to ride, to run,  
To spend, to give, to want, to be undone.

To the liberality of a patron he owed his education at Cambridge. It was then the heyday of Renaissance studies, and Spenser steeped himself in Greek, Latin and Italian literatures. Everything that was antique was then in favor at the universities; there was a revival of

interest in Old-English poetry, which accounts largely for Spenser's use of obsolete words and his imitation of Chaucer's spelling.

After graduation he spent some time in the north of England, probably as a tutor, and had an unhappy love affair, which he celebrated in his poems to Rosalind. Then he returned to London, lived by favor in the houses of Sidney and Leicester, and through these powerful patrons was appointed secretary to Lord Grey de Wilton, the queen's deputy in Ireland.

From this time on our poet is represented as a melancholy Spenser's "exile," but that Exile is a poetic fiction. At that time Ireland, having refused to follow the Reformation, was engaged in a desperate struggle for civil and religious liberty. Every English army that sailed to crush this rebellion was accompanied by a swarm of parasites, each inspired by the hope of getting one of the rich estates that were confiscated from Irish owners. Spenser seems to have been one of these expectant adventurers who accompanied Lord Grey in his campaign of brutality. To the horrors of that campaign the poet was blind;<sup>1</sup> his sympathies were all for his patron Grey, who appears in *The Faery Queen* as Sir Artegall, "the model of true justice."

For his services Spenser was awarded the castle of Kilcolman and 3000 acres of land, which had been taken from the Earl of Desmond. In the same way Raleigh became an Irish landlord, with 40,000 acres to his credit; and so these two famous Elizabethans were thrown

<sup>1</sup> The barbarism of Spenser's view, a common one at that time, is reflected in his *View of the Present State of Ireland*. Honorable warfare on land or sea was unknown in Elizabeth's day. Scores of pirate ships of all nations were then openly preying on commerce. Drake, Frobisher and many other Elizabethan "heroes" were at times mere buccaneers who shared their plunder with the queen. In putting down the Irish rebellion Lords Grey and Essex used some of the same horrible methods employed by the notorious Duke of Alva in the Netherlands.



EDMUND SPENSER

together in exile, as they termed it. Both longed to return to England, to enjoy London society and the revenues of Irish land at the same time; but unfortunately one condition of their immense grants was that they should occupy the land and keep the rightful owners from possessing it.

In Ireland Spenser began to write his masterpiece *The Faery Queen*. Raleigh, to whom the first three books were read, was so impressed **Work in Ireland** by the beauty of the work that he hurried the poet off to London, and gained for him the royal favor. In the poem "Colin Clout's Come Home Again" we may read Spenser's account of how the court impressed him after his sojourn in Ireland.



RALEIGH'S BIRTHPLACE, BUDLEIGH SALTERTON

Hayes, Devonshire

The publication of the first parts of *The Faery Queen* (1590) raised Spenser to the foremost place in English letters. He was made poet-laureate, and used every influence of patrons and of literary success to the end that he be allowed to remain in London; but the queen was flint-hearted, insisting that he must give up his estate or occupy it. So he returned sorrowfully to "exile," and wrote three more books of *The Faery Queen*. To his other offices was added that of sheriff of County Cork, an adventurous office for any man even in times of peace, and for a poet, in a time of turmoil, an invitation to disaster. Presently another rebellion broke out; Kilcolman castle was burned, and the poet's family barely escaped with their lives. It was

said by Ben Jonson that one of Spenser's children and some parts of *The Faery Queen* perished in the fire, but the truth of the saying has not been established.

Soon after this experience, which crushed the poet's spirit, he was ordered on official business to London, and died on the journey in 1599. As he was buried beside Chaucer, in Westminster Abbey, poets were seen casting memorial verses and the pens that had written them into his tomb.

In character Spenser was unfitted either for the intrigues among Elizabeth's favorites or for the more desperate scenes amid which **Character** his lot was cast. Unlike his friend Raleigh, who was a man of action, Spenser was essentially a dreamer, and except in Cambridge he seems never to have felt at home. His criticism of the age as barren and hopeless, and the melancholy of the greater part of his work, indicate that for him, at least, the great Elizabethan times were "out of joint." The world, which thinks of Spenser as a great poet, has forgotten that he thought of himself as a disappointed man.

**Works of Spenser.** The poems of Spenser may be conveniently grouped in three classes. In the first are the pastorals of *The Shepherd's Calendar*, in which he reflects some of the poetical fashions of his age. In the second are the allegories of *The Faery Queen*, in which he pictures the state of England as a struggle between good and evil. In the third class are his occasional poems of friendship and love, such as the *Amoretti*. All his works are alike musical, and all remote from ordinary life, like the eerie music of a wind harp.

*The Shepherd's Calendar* (1579) is famous as the poem which announced that a successor to Chaucer had at last **Shepherd's** **Calendar** appeared in England. It is an amateurish work in which Spenser tried various meters; and to analyze it is to discover two discordant elements, which we may call fashionable poetry and puritanic preaching. Let us understand these elements clearly, for apart from them the *Calendar* is a meaningless work.

It was a fashion among Italian poets to make eclogues or pastoral poems about shepherds, their dancing, piping,

love-making,—everything except a shepherd's proper business. Spenser followed this artificial fashion in his *Calendar* by making twelve pastorals, one for each month of the year. These all take the form of conversations, accompanied by music and dancing, and the personages are Cuddie, Diggon, Hobbinoll, and other fantastic shepherds. According to poetic custom these should sing only of love; but in Spenser's day religious controversy was rampant, and flattery might not be overlooked by a poet who aspired to royal favor. So while the January pastoral tells of the unhappy love of Colin Clout (Spenser) for Rosalind, the springtime of April calls for a song in praise of Elizabeth:

Lo, how finely the Graces can it foot  
To the instrument!  
They dance deffly and singen soote,  
In their merriment.  
Wants not a fourth Grace to make the dance even?  
Let that room to my Lady be yeven.  
She shall be a Grace,  
To fill the fourth place,  
And reign with the rest in heaven.

In May the shepherds are rival pastors of the Reformation, who end their sermons with an animal fable; in summer they discourse of Puritan theology; October brings them to contemplate the trials and disappointments of a poet, and the series ends with a parable comparing life to the four seasons of the year.

The moralizing of *The Shepherd's Calendar* and the uncouth spelling which Spenser affected detract from the interest of the poem; but one who has patience to read it finds on almost every page some fine poetic line, and occasionally a good song, like the following (from the August pastoral) in which two shepherds alternately supply the lines of a roundelay:

Sitting upon a hill so high,  
Hey, ho, the high hill!  
The while my flock did feed thereby,  
The while the shepherd' self did spill,

I saw the bouncing Bellibone,  
 Hey, ho, Bonnibell !  
 Tripping over the dale alone ;  
 She can trip it very well.  
 Well deckéd in a frock of gray,  
 Hey, ho, gray is greet !  
 And in a kirtle of green say ;  
 The green is for maidens meet.  
 A chaplet on her head she wore,  
 Hey, ho, chapelet !  
 Of sweet violets therein was store,  
 She sweeter than the violet.

**The Faery Queen.** Let us hear one of the stories of this celebrated poem, and after the tale is told we may discover Spenser's purpose in writing all the others.

From the court of Gloriana, Queen of Faery, the gallant Sir Guyon sets out on adventure bent, and with him is a holy Palmer, or pilgrim, to protect him from the evil that lurks by every wayside. Hardly have the two entered the first wood when they fall into the hands of the wicked Archimago, who spends his time in devising spells or enchantments for the purpose of leading honest folk astray.

For all he did was to deceive good knights,  
 And draw them from pursuit of praise and fame.

Escaping from the snare, Guyon hears a lamentation, and turns aside to find a beautiful woman dying beside a dead knight. Her story is, that her man has been led astray by the Lady Acrasia, who leads many knights to her Bower of Bliss, and there makes them forget honor and knightly duty. Guyon vows to right this wrong, and proceeds on the adventure.

With the Palmer and a boatman he embarks in a skiff and crosses the Gulf of Greediness, deadly whirlpools on one side, and on the other the Magnet Mountain with wrecks of ships strewed about its foot. Sighting the fair Wandering Isles, he attempts to land, attracted here by a beautiful damsel, there by a woman in distress ; but the Palmer tells him that these seeming women are evil shadows placed there to lead men astray. Next he meets the monsters of the deep, " sea-shouldering whales," " scolopendras," " grisly wassermans," " mighty monoceroses with unmeasured tails." Escaping these, he meets a greater peril in the mermaids, who sing to him alluringly :

This is port of rest from troublous toil,  
 The world's sweet inn from pain and wearisome turmoil.

Many other sea-dangers are passed before Guyon comes to land, where he is immediately charged by a bellowing herd of savage beasts. Only the power of the Palmer's holy staff saves the knight from annihilation.

This is the last physical danger which Guyon encounters. As he goes forward the country becomes an earthly paradise, where pleasures call to him from every side. It is his soul, not his body, which is now in peril. Here is the Palace of Pleasure, its wondrous gates carved with images representing Jason's search for the Golden Fleece. Beyond it are parks, gardens, fountains, and the beautiful Lady Excess, who squeezes grapes into a golden cup and offers it to Guyon as an invitation to linger. The scene grows ever more entrancing as he rejects the cup of Excess and pushes onward:

Eftsoones they heard a most melodious sound  
 Of all that mote delight a dainty ear,  
 Such as at once might not on living ground,  
 Save in this paradise, be heard elsewhere:  
 Right hard it was for wight which did it hear  
 To read what manner music that mote be;  
 For all that pleasing is to living ear  
 Was there consorted in one harmony;  
 Birds, voices, instruments, winds, waters, all agree.

Amid such allurements Guyon comes at last to where beautiful Acrasia lives, with knights who forget their knighthood. From the open portal comes a melody, the voice of an unseen singer lifting up the old song of Epicurus and of Omar:

Gather the rose of love whilst yet is time.

The following scenes in the Bower of Bliss were plainly suggested by the Palace of Circe, in the *Odyssey*; but where Homer is direct, simple, forceful, Spenser revels in luxuriant details. He charms all Guyon's senses with color, perfume, beauty, harmony; then he remembers that he is writing a moral poem, and suddenly his delighted knight turns reformer. He catches Acrasia in a net woven by the Palmer, and proceeds to smash her exquisite abode with puritanic thoroughness:

But all those pleasaunt bowers and palace brave  
 Guyon brake down with rigour pitilesse.

As they fare forth after the destruction, the herd of horrible beasts is again encountered, and lo! all these creatures are men whom Acrasia has transformed into brutal shapes. The Palmer "strooks" them all with his holy staff, and they resume their human semblance. Some are glad, others wroth at the change; and one named Grylle, who had been a hog, reviles his

rescuers for disturbing him; which gives the Palmer a final chance to moralize:

Let Grylle be Grylle and have his hoggish mind;  
But let us hence depart while weather serves and wind.

Such is Spenser's story of Sir Guyon, or Temperance. It is a long story, drifting through eighty-seven stanzas, but it is only a final chapter or canto of the second book of *The Faery Queen*. Preceding it are eleven other cantos which serve as an introduction. So leisurely is Spenser in telling a tale! One canto deals with the wiles of Archimago and of the "false witch" Duessa; in another the varlet Braggadocchio steals Guyon's horse and impersonates a knight, until he is put to shame by the fair huntress Belphebe, who is Queen Elizabeth in disguise. Now Elizabeth had a hawk face which was far from comely, but behold how it appeared to a poet:

Her face so fair, as flesh it seemëd not,  
But heavenly portrait of bright angel's hue,  
Clear as the sky, withouten blame or blot,  
Through goodly mixture of complexions due;  
And in her cheek the vermeil red did shew  
Like roses in a bed of lilies shed,  
The which ambrosial odours from them threw  
And gazers' sense with double pleasure fed,  
Able to heal the sick and to revive the dead.

There are a dozen more stanzas devoted to her voice, her eyes, her hair, her more than mortal beauty. Other cantos of the same book are devoted to Guyon's temptations; to his victories over Furor and Mammon; to his rescue of the Lady Alma, besieged by a horde of villains in her fair Castle of Temperance. In this castle was an aged man, blind but forever doting over old records; and this gives Spenser the inspiration for another long canto devoted to the ancient kings of Britain. So all is fish that comes to this poet's net; but as one who is angling for trout is vexed by the nibbling of chubs, the reader grows weary of Spenser's story before his story really begins.

The First Book Other books of *The Faery Queen* are so similar in character to the one just described that a canto from any one of them may be placed without change in any other. In the first book, for example, the Redcross Knight (Holiness) fares forth accompanied by the Lady Una (Religion). Straightway they meet the enchanter Archimago, who separates them by fraud and magic. The Redcross Knight, led to believe that his Una is false, comes, after many adventures, to Queen Lucifer in the House of Pride; meanwhile Una wanders alone amidst perils, and by her beauty subdues the lion and the satyrs of the wood. The rest of the book recounts their adventures with paynims, giants and monsters, with Error, Avarice, Falsehood and other allegorical figures.

It is impossible to outline such a poem, for the simple reason that it has no outlines. It is a phantasmagoria of beautiful and grotesque shapes, of romance, morality and magic. Reading it is like watching cloud masses, aloft and remote, in which the imagination pictures men, monsters, landscapes, which change as we view them without cause or consequence. Though *The Faery Queen* is overfilled with adventure, it has no action, as we ordinarily understand the term. Its continual motion is without force or direction, like the vague motions of a dream.

What, then, was Spenser's object in writing *The Faery Queen*? His professed object was to use poetry in the service of morality by portraying the political and religious affairs of England as emblematic of a worldwide conflict between good and evil. According to his philosophy (which, he tells us, he borrowed from Aristotle) there were twelve chief virtues, and he planned twelve books to celebrate them.<sup>1</sup> In each book a knight or a lady representing a single virtue goes forth into the world to conquer evil. In all the

<sup>1</sup> Only six of these books are extant, treating of the Redcross Knight or Holiness, Sir Guyon or Temperance, Britomartis or Chastity, Cambel and Triamond or Friendship, Sir Artegall or Justice, and Sir Calidore or Courtesy. The rest of the allegory, if written, may have been destroyed in the fire of Kilcolman.

books Arthur, or Magnificece (the sum of all virtue), is apt to appear in any crisis ; Lady Una represents religion ; Archimago is another name for heresy, and Duessa for falsehood ; and in order to give point to Spenser's allegory the courtiers and statesmen of the age are all flattered as glorious virtues or condemned as ugly vices.

Those who are fond of puzzles may delight in giving names and dates to these allegorical personages, in recognizing *The Allegory* Elizabeth in Belphœbe or Britomart or Marcella, Sidney in the Redcross Knight, Leicester in Arthur, Raleigh in Timias, Mary Stuart in Duessa, and so on through the list of characters good or evil. The beginner will wisely ignore all such interpretation, and for two reasons : first, because Spenser's allegories are too shadowy to be taken seriously ; and second, because as a chronicler of the times he is outrageously partisan and untrustworthy. In short, to search for any reality in *The Faery Queen* is to spoil the poem as a work of the imagination. "If you do not meddle with the allegory," said Hazlitt, "the allegory will not meddle with you."

**Minor Poems.** The minor poems of Spenser are more interesting, because more human, than the famous work which we have just considered. Prominent among these poems are the *Amoretti*, a collection of sonnets written in honor of the Irish girl Elizabeth, who became the poet's wife. They are artificial, to be sure, but no more so than other love poems of the period. In connection with a few of these sonnets may be read Spenser's four "Hymns" (in honor of Love, Beauty, Heavenly Love and Heavenly Beauty) and especially his "Epithalamium," a marriage hymn which Brooke calls, with pardonable enthusiasm, "the most glorious love song in the English language."

**A Criticism of Spenser.** In reading *The Faery Queen* one must note the contrast between Spenser's matter and his manner. His matter is : religion, chivalry, mythology, Italian

romance, Arthurian legends, the struggles of Spain and England on the Continent, the Reformation, the turmoil of political parties, the appeal of the New World,—a summary of all stirring matters that interested his own tumultuous age. His manner is the reverse of what one might expect under the circumstances. He writes no stirring epic of victory or defeat, and never a downright word of a downright man, but a dreamy, shadowy narrative as soothing as the abode of Morpheus :

And, more to lulle him in his slumber soft,  
 A trickling stream from high rock tumbling downe,  
 And ever-drizzling rain upon the loft,  
 Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne  
 Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swowne.  
 No other noyse, nor people's troublous cryes,  
 As still are wont t' annoy the wallèd towne,  
 Might there be heard; but careless Quiet lyes  
 Wrapt in eternal silence, far from enemyes.

Such stanzas (and they abound in every book of *The Faery Queen*) are poems in themselves ; but unfortunately they distract attention from the story, which soon loses all progression and becomes as the rocking of an idle boat on the swell of a placid sea. The invention of this melodious stanza, ever since called "Spenserian," was in itself a notable achievement which influenced all subsequent English poetry.<sup>1</sup>

As Spenser's faults cannot be ignored, let us be rid of them as quickly as possible. We record, then : the unreality of his Spenser's great work ; its lack of human interest, which causes Faults most of us to drop the poem after a single canto ; its affected antique spelling ; its use of *fone* (foes), *dan* (master), *teene* (trouble), *swink* (labor), and of many more obsolete words ; its frequent torturing of the king's English to make a rime ; its utter lack of humor, appearing in such absurd lines as,

Astond he stood, and up his hair did hove.

<sup>1</sup> The Spenserian was an improvement on the *ottava-rima*, or eight-line stanza, of the Italians. It has been used by Burns in "The Cotter's Saturday Night," by Shelley in "The Revolt of Islam," by Byron in "Childe Harold," by Keats in "The Eve of St. Agnes," and by many other poets.

Such defects are more than offset by Spenser's poetic virtues. We note, first, the moral purpose which allies him with the medieval poets in aim, but not in method. By most **Moral Ideal** medieval romancers virtue was regarded as a means to an end, as in the *Morte d' Arthur*, where a knight made a vow of purity in order to obtain a sight of the Holy Grail. With Spenser virtue is not a means but an end, beautiful and desirable for its own sake; while sin is so pictured that men avoid it because of its intrinsic ugliness. This is the moral secret of *The Faery Queen*, in which virtues are personified as noble knights or winsome women, while the vices appear in the repulsive guise of hags, monsters and "loathy beasts."

Spenser's sense of ideal beauty or, as Lanier expressed it, "the beauty of holiness and the holiness of beauty," is perhaps **Sense of Beauty** his greatest poetic quality. He is the poet-painter of the Renaissance; he fills his pages with descriptions of airy loveliness, as Italian artists covered the high ceilings of Venice with the reflected splendor of earth and heaven. Moreover, his sense of beauty found expression in such harmonious lines that one critic describes him as having set beautiful figures moving to exquisite music.

In consequence of this beauty and melody, Spenser has been the inspiration of nearly all later English singers. Milton was one of the first to call him master, and then in a long succession such diverse poets as Dryden, Burns, Wordsworth, Scott, Shelley, Keats, Byron, Tennyson and Swinburne. The poet of "Faery" has influenced all these and more so deeply that he has won the distinctive title of "the poets' poet."

#### THE DRAMATISTS

"Few events in our literary history are so startling as this sudden rise of the Elizabethan drama," says Green in his *History of the English People*, and his judgment is echoed by other writers who speak of the "marvelous efflorescence" of the English drama as a matter beyond explanation. Startling

it may be, with its frank expression of a nation's life, the glory and the shame of it; but there is nothing sudden or inexplicable about it, as we may see by reviewing the history of playwriting in England.

**The Religious Drama.** In its simplicity the drama is a familiar story retold to the eye by actors who "make believe" that they are the heroes of the action. In this elemental form the play is almost as old as humanity. Indeed, it seems to be a natural impulse of children to act a story which has given them pleasure; of primitive men also, who from time immemorial have kept alive the memory of tribal heroes by representing their deeds in play or pantomime. Thus, certain parts of *Hiawatha* are survivals of dramatic myths that were once acted at the spring assembly of the Algonquin Indians. An interesting fact concerning these primitive dramas, whether in India or Greece or Persia, is that they were invariably associated with some religious belief or festival.

A later example of this is found in the Church, which at an early age began to make its holy-day services more impressive **The First Miracles** by means of *Miracle* plays and *Mysteries*.<sup>1</sup> At Christmas time, for example, the beautiful story of Bethlehem would be made more vivid by placing in a corner of the parish church an image of a babe in a manger, with shepherds and the Magi at hand, and the choir in white garments chanting the *Gloria in excelsis*. Other festivals were celebrated in a similar way until a cycle of simple dramas had been prepared, clustering around four cardinal points of Christian teaching; namely, Creation, the Fall, Redemption, and Doomsday or the Last Judgment.

At first such plays were given in the church, and were deeply religious in spirit. They made a profound impression

<sup>1</sup> In France any play representing the life of a saint was called *miracle*, and a play dealing with the life of Christ was called *mystère*. In England no such distinction was made, the name "Miracle" being given to any drama dealing with Bible history or with the lives of the saints.

in England especially, where people flocked in such numbers to see them that presently they overflowed to the churchyard, and from there to the city squares or the town common. Once outside the church, they were taken up by the guilds or trades-unions, in whose hands they lost much of their religious character. Actors were trained for the stage rather than for the church, and to please the crowds elements of comedy and buffoonery were introduced,<sup>1</sup> until the sacred drama degenerated into a farce. Here and there, however, a true Miracle survived and kept its character unspotted even to our own day, as in the famous Passion Play at Oberammergau.

When and how these plays came to England is unknown. By the year 1300 they were extremely popular, and continued so until they were replaced by the Elizabethan drama. Most of the important towns of England had each its own cycle of plays<sup>2</sup> which were given once a year, the performance lasting from three to eight days in a prolonged festival. Every guild responsible for a play had its own stage, which was set on wheels and drawn about the town to appointed open places, where a crowd was waiting for it. When it passed on, to repeat the play to a different audience, another stage took its place. The play of "Creation" would be succeeded by the "Temptation of Adam and Eve," and so on until the whole cycle of Miracles from "Creation" to "Doomsday" had been performed. It was the play not the audience that moved, and in this trundling about of the stage van we are reminded of Thespis, the alleged founder of Greek tragedy, who went about with his cart and his play from one festival to another.

<sup>1</sup> In the "Shepherd's Play" or "Play of the Nativity," for example, the adoration of the Magi is interrupted by Mak, who steals a sheep and carries it to his wife. She hides the carcass in a cradle, and sings a lullaby to it while the indignant shepherds are searching the house.

<sup>2</sup> At present only four good cycles of Miracles are known to exist; namely, the Chester, York, Townley (or Wakefield) and Coventry plays. The number of plays varies, from twenty-five in the Chester to forty-eight in the York cycle.

Two other dramatic types, the Morality and the Interlude, probably grew out of the religious drama. In one of the old **Moralities** Miracles we find two characters named Truth and Righteousness, who are severe in their denunciation of Adam, while Mercy and Peace plead for his life. Other virtues appear in other Miracles, then Death and the Seven Deadly Sins, until we have a play in which all the characters are personified virtues or vices. Such a play was called a Morality, and it aimed to teach right conduct, as the Miracles had at first aimed to teach right doctrine.

The Interlude was at first a crude sketch, a kind of ancient side show, introduced into the Miracle plays after the latter **Interludes** had been taken up by the guilds. A boy with a trained pig, a quarrel between husband and wife, — any farce was welcome so long as it amused the crowd or enlivened the Miracle. In time, however, the writing of Interludes became a profession ; they improved rapidly in character, were separated from the Miracles, and were performed at entertainments or " revels " by trade guilds, by choir boys and by companies of strolling actors or " minstrels." At the close of such entertainments the minstrels would add a prayer for the king (an inheritance from the religious drama), and this impressive English custom still survives in the singing of " God Save the King " at the end of a public assembly.

**The Secular Drama.** When the Normans came to England they brought with them a love of pageants, or spectacles, that was destined to have an important influence on the drama. These pageants, representing scenes from history or mythology (such as the bout between Richard and Saladin, or the combat between St. George and the Dragon), were staged to celebrate feasts, royal weddings, treaties or any other event that seemed of special importance. From Norman times they increased steadily in favor until Elizabeth began her " progresses " through England, when every castle or town must prepare a play or pageant to entertain the royal visitor.

From simple pantomime the pageant developed into a masque; that is, a dramatic entertainment accompanied by poetry and music. Hundreds of such masques were written and acted before Shakespeare's day; the taste for them survived long after the Elizabethan drama had decayed; and a few of them, such as *The Sad Shepherd* of Ben Jonson and the *Comus* of Milton, may still be read with pleasure.

While the nobles were thus occupied with pageants and masques, the common people were developing a crude drama in which comedy predominated. Such were the *Popular Comedy* Christmas plays or "mummings," introducing the characters of Merry Andrew and Old King Cole, which began in England before the Conquest, and which survived in country places down to our own times.<sup>1</sup> More widespread than the mummings were crude spectacles prepared in celebration of secular holidays,—the May Day plays, for example, which represented the adventures of Robin Hood and his merry men. To these popular comedies the Church contributed liberally, though unwillingly; its holy days became holidays to the crowd, and its solemn fasts were given over to merriment, to the *festa fatuorum*, or play of fools, in which such characters as Boy Bishop, Lord of Misrule and various clowns or jesters made a scandalous caricature of things ecclesiastical. Such plays, prepared largely by clerks and choir boys, were repeatedly denounced by priest or bishop, but they increased rapidly from the twelfth to the sixteenth century.

By the latter date England seemed in danger of going spectacle-mad; and we may understand the symptoms if we remember that the play was then almost the only *Spread of the Drama* form of popular amusement; that it took the place of the modern newspaper, novel, political election and ball game, all combined. The trade guilds, having trained actors

<sup>1</sup> In Hardy's novel *The Return of the Native* may be found a description of these mummings (from "mum," a mask) in the nineteenth century. In Scott's novel *The Abbot* we have a glimpse of other mummings, such as were given to celebrate feast days of the Church.

for the springtime Miracles, continued to give other plays throughout the year. The servants of a nobleman, having given a pageant to welcome the queen, went out through the country in search of money or adventure, and presented the same spectacle wherever they could find an audience. When the Renaissance came, reviving interest in the classics, Latin plays were taken up eagerly and presented in modified form by every important school or university in England. In this way our first regular comedy, *Ralph Royster Doyster* (written by Nicholas Udall, Master of Eton, and acted by his schoolboys *cir. 1552*), was adapted from an old Latin comedy, the *Miles Gloriosus* of Plautus.

The awakened interest in music had also its influences on the English drama. The choir boys of a church were frequently called upon to furnish music at a play, and from this it was but a step to furnish both the play and the music. So great was the demand to hear these boys that certain choir masters (those of St. Paul's and the Chapel Royal) obtained the right to take any poor boy with a good voice and train him, ostensibly for the service of the Church, but in reality to make a profitable actor out of him. This dangerous practice was stimulated by the fact that the feminine parts in all plays had to be taken by boys, the stage being then deemed an unfit place for a woman. And it certainly was. If a boy "took to his lines," his services were sold from one company to another, much as the popular ball player is now sold, but with this difference, that the poor boy had no voice or profit in the transaction. Some of these lads were cruelly treated; all were in danger of moral degradation. The abuse was finally suppressed by Parliament, but not until the choir-boy players were rivals of the regular companies, in which Shakespeare and Ben Jonson played their parts.

**Classical and English Drama.** At the time of Shakespeare's birth two types of plays were represented in England. The classic drama, modeled upon Greek or Roman plays, was

constructed according to the dramatic "unities," which Aristotle foreshadowed in his *Treatise on Poetry*. According to this authority, every play must be concerned with a "single, important and complete event"; in other words, it must have "unity of action." A second rule, relating to "unity of time," required that the events represented in a play must all occur within a single day. A third provided that the action should take place in the same locality, and this was known as the "unity of place."<sup>1</sup> Other rules of classic drama required that tragedy and comedy should not occur in the same play, and that battles, murders and all such violent affairs should never be represented on the stage but be announced at the proper time by a messenger.

The native plays ignored these classic unities. The public demanded chronicle plays, for example, in which the action must cover years of time, and jump from court to battlefield in following the hero. Tragedy and comedy, instead of being separated, were represented as meeting at every crossroad or entering the church door side by side. So the most solemn Miracles were scandalized by humorous Interludes, and into the most tragic of Shakespeare's scenes entered the fool and the jester. A Greek playwright might object to brutalizing scenes before a cultured audience, but the crowds who came to an Elizabethan play were of a temper to enjoy a Mohawk scalp dance. They were accustomed to violent scenes and sensations; they had witnessed the rack and gibbet in constant operation; they were familiar with the sight of human heads decorating the posts of London Bridge or carried about on the pikes of soldiers. After witnessing such horrors free of cost, they would follow their queen and pay their money to see a chained bear torn to pieces by ferocious bulldogs. Then they would go to a play, and throw stones or dead cats at the actors if their tastes were not gratified.

<sup>1</sup> The Roman philosopher and dramatist Seneca (d. 65 A.D.) is supposed to have established this rule. The influence of Aristotle on the "unities" is a matter of dispute.

To please such crowds no stage action could possibly be too rough; hence the riotousness of the early theaters, which for safety were placed outside the city limits; hence also the blood and thunder of Shakespeare's *Adronicus* and the atrocities represented in the plays of Kyd and Marlowe.

Following such different ideals, two schools of playwrights appeared in England. One school, the University Wits, to whom we owe our first real tragedy, *Gorboduc*,<sup>1</sup> aimed to make the English drama like that of Greece and Rome. The other, or native, school aimed at a play which should represent life, or please the crowd, without regard to any rules ancient or modern. The best Elizabethan drama was a combination of classic and native elements, with the latter predominating.

**Shakespeare's Predecessors.** In a general way, all unknown men who for three centuries had been producing miracle plays, moralities, interludes, masques and pageants were Shakespeare's predecessors; but we refer here to a small group of playwrights who rapidly developed what is now called the Elizabethan drama. The time was the last quarter of the sixteenth century.

By that time England was as excited over the stage as a modern community over the "movies." Plays were given on every important occasion by choir boys, by noblemen's servants, by court players governed by the Master of Revels, by grammar schools and universities, by trade guilds in every shire of England. Actors were everywhere in training, and audiences gathered as to a bull-baiting whenever a new spectacle was

<sup>1</sup> This play, called also *Ferrex and Porrex*, was written by Sackville and Norton, and played in 1562, only two years before Shakespeare's birth. It related how Gorboduc divided his British kingdom between his two sons, who quarreled and threw the whole country into rebellion,—a story much like that used by Shakespeare in *King Lear*. The violent parts of this first tragedy were not represented on the stage but were announced by a messenger. At the end of each act a "chorus" summed up the situation, as in classic tragedy. *Gorboduc* differed from all earlier plays in that it was divided into acts and scenes, and was written in blank verse. It is generally regarded as the first in time of the Elizabethan dramas. A few comedies divided into acts and scenes were written before *Gorboduc*, but not in the blank verse with which we associate an Elizabethan play.

presented. Then came the awakening of the national consciousness, the sense of English pride and power after the defeat of the Armada, and this new national spirit found expression in hundreds of chronicle plays representing the past glories of Britain.<sup>1</sup>

It was at this "psychological moment," when English patriotism was aroused and London was as the heart of England, that a group of young actors — Greene, Llyl, Peele, Dekker, Nash, Kyd, Marlowe, and others of less degree — seized upon the crude popular drama, enlarged it to meet the needs of the time, and within a single generation made it such a brilliant reflection of national thought and feeling as no other age has thus far produced.

**Marlowe.** The best of these early playwrights, each of whom contributed some element of value, was Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), who is sometimes called the father of the Elizabethan drama. He appeared in London sometime before 1587, when his first drama *Tamburlaine* took the city by storm. The prologue of this drama is at once a criticism and a promise:

From jigging veins of rhyming mother-wits,  
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,  
We 'll lead you to the stately tent of war,  
Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine  
Threatening the world with high-astounding terms,  
And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.

The "jigging" refers to the doggerel verse of the earlier drama, and "clownage" to the crude horseplay intended to amuse the crowd. For the doggerel is substituted blank verse, "Marlowe's mighty line" as it has ever since been called, since he was the first to use it with power; and for the "clownage" he promises a play of human interest revolving around a man whose sole ambition is for world power, — such ambition as stirred the English nation when it called halt to the encroachments of

<sup>1</sup> Over two hundred chronicle plays, representing almost every important character in English history, appeared within a few years. Shakespeare wrote thirteen plays founded on English history, and three on the history of other countries.

Spain, and announced that henceforth it must be reckoned with in the councils of the Continent. Though *Tamburlaine* is largely rant and bombast, there is something in it which fascinates us like the sight of a wild bull on a rampage; for such was Timur, the hero of the first play to which we confidently give the name Elizabethan. In the latter part of the play the action grows more intense; there is a sense of tragedy, of impending doom, in the vain attempt of the hero to oppose fate. He can conquer a world but not his own griefs; he ends his triumphant career with a pathetic admission of failure: "And Tamburlaine, the Scourge of God, must die."

The succeeding plays of Marlowe are all built on the same model; that is, they are one-man plays, and the man is dominated by a passion for power. *Doctor Faustus*, the most poetical of Marlowe's works, is a play representing a scholar who hungers for more knowledge, especially the knowledge of magic. In order to obtain it he makes a bargain with the devil, selling his soul for twenty-four years of unlimited power and pleasure.<sup>1</sup> *The Jew of Malta* deals with the lust for such power as wealth gives, and the hero is the money-lender Barabas, a monster of avarice and hate, who probably suggested to Shakespeare the character of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. The last play written by Marlowe was *Edward II*, which dealt with a man who might have been powerful, since he was a king, but who furnished a terrible example of weakness and petty tyranny that ended miserably in a dungeon.

After writing these four plays with their extraordinary promise, Marlowe, who led a wretched life, was stabbed in a tavern brawl. The splendid work which he only began (for he died under thirty years of age) was immediately taken up by the greatest of all dramatists, Shakespeare.

<sup>1</sup> The story is the same as that of Goethe's *Faust*. It was a favorite story, or rather collection of stories, of the Middle Ages, and was first printed as the *History of Johann Faust* in Frankfort, in 1587. Marlowe's play was written, probably, in the same year.

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564-1616)

"The name of Shakespeare is the greatest in all literature. No man ever came near to him in the creative power of the mind; no man ever had such strength and such variety of imagination." (Hallam)

"Shakespeare's mind is the horizon beyond which, at present, we do not see." (Emerson)

"I do not believe that any book or person or event in my life ever made so great an impression on me as the plays of Shakespeare. They appear to be the work of some heavenly genius." (Goethe)

Shakespeare's name has become a signal for enthusiasm. The tributes quoted above are doubtless extravagant, but they were written by men of mark in three different countries, and they serve to indicate the tremendous impression which Shakespeare has left upon the world. He wrote in his day some thirty-seven plays and a few poems; since then as many hundred volumes have been written in praise of his accomplishment. He died three centuries ago, without caring enough for his own work to print it. At the present time unnumbered critics, historians, scholars, are still explaining the mind and the art displayed in that same neglected work: Most of these eulogists begin or end their volumes with the remark that Shakespeare is so great as to be above praise or criticism. As Taine writes, before plunging into his own analysis, "Lofty words, eulogies are all used in vain; Shakespeare needs not praise but comprehension merely."

**Life.** It is probably because so very little is known about Shakespeare that so many bulky biographies have been written of him. Not a solitary letter of his is known to exist; not a play comes down to us as he wrote it. A few documents written by other men, and sometimes ending in a sprawling signature by Shakespeare, which looks as if made by a hand accustomed to almost any labor except that of the pen,—these are all we have to build upon. One record, in dribbling Latin, relates to the christening of "Gulielmus filius Johannes Shakspere"; a second, unreliable as a village gossip, tells an anecdote of the same person's boyhood; a third refers to Shakespeare as "one of his

Majesty's poor players"; a fourth records the burial of the poet's son Hamnet; a fifth speaks of "Willi. Shakspere, gentleman"; a sixth is a bit of wretched doggerel inscribed on the poet's tombstone; a seventh tells us that in 1622, only six years after the poet's death, the public had so little regard for his art that the council of his native Stratford bribed his old company of players to go away from the town without giving a performance.

It is from such dry and doubtful records that we must construct a biography, supplementing the meager facts by liberal use of our imagination.

In the beautiful Warwickshire village of Stratford our poet was born, probably in the month of April, in 1564. His mother, Mary **Early Days** Arden, was a farmer's daughter; his father was a butcher and small tradesman, who at one time held the office of high bailiff of the village. There was a small grammar school in Stratford, and Shakespeare may have attended it for a few years. When he was about fourteen years old his father, who was often in lawsuits, was imprisoned for debt, and the boy probably left school and went to work. At eighteen he married Anne Hathaway, a peasant's daughter eight years older than himself; at twenty-three, with his father still in debt and his own family of three children to provide for, Shakespeare took the footpath that led to the world beyond his native village.<sup>1</sup>

From Stratford he went to London, from solitude to crowds, from beautiful rural scenes to dirty streets, from natural country people to **In London** seekers after the bubble of fame or fortune. Why he went is largely a matter of speculation. That he was looking for work; that he followed a company of actors, as a boy follows a circus; that he was driven out of Stratford after poaching on the game preserves of Sir Thomas Lucy, whom he ridiculed in the plays of *Henry VI* and *Merry Wives*,—these and other theories are still debated. The most probable explanation of his departure is that the stage lured him away, as the printing press called the young Franklin from whatever else he undertook; for he seems to have headed straight for the theater, and to have found his place not by chance or calculation but by unerring instinct. England was then, as we have noted,

<sup>1</sup> Such is the prevalent opinion of Shakespeare's early days; but we are dealing here with surmises, not with established facts. There are scholars who allege that Shakespeare's poverty is a myth; that his father was prosperous to the end of his days; that he probably took the full course in Latin and Greek at the Stratford school. Almost everything connected with the poet's youth is still a matter of dispute.

in danger of going stage-mad, and Shakespeare appeared to put method into the madness.

Beginning, undoubtedly, as an actor of small parts, he soon learned the tricks of the stage and the humors of his audience. His first **Actor and Playwright** dramatic work was to revise old plays, giving them some new twist or setting to please the fickle public. Then he worked with other playwrights, with Llyl and Peele perhaps, and the horrors of his *Titus Andronicus* are sufficient evidence of his collaboration with Marlowe. Finally he walked alone, having learned his steps, and *Romeo and Juliet* and *Midsummer Night's Dream* announced that a great poet and dramatist had suddenly appeared in England.

**Period of Gloom** in London was apparently a time of health, of joyousness, of enthusiasm which comes with the successful use of one's powers. It was followed by a period of gloom and sorrow, to which something of bitterness was added. What

occasioned the change is again a matter of speculation. The first conjecture is that Shakespeare was a man to whom the low ideals of the Elizabethan stage were intolerable, and this opinion is strengthened after reading certain of Shakespeare's sonnets, which reflect a loathing for the theaters and the mancless crowds that filled them. Another conjectural cause of his gloom was the fate of certain noblemen with whom he was apparently on terms of friendship, to whom he dedicated his poems, and from whom he received substantial gifts of money. Of these powerful friends, the Earl of Essex was beheaded for treason, Pembroke was banished, and Southampton



THE LIBRARY, STRATFORD GRAMMAR SCHOOL  
ATTENDED BY SHAKESPEARE

had gone to that grave of so many high hopes, the Tower of London. Shakespeare may have shared the sorrow of these men, as once he had shared their joy, and there are critics who assume that he was personally implicated in the crazy attempt of Essex at rebellion.

Whatever the cause of his grief, Shakespeare shows in his works that he no longer looks on the world with the clear eyes of youth. The great tragedies of this period, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Cæsar*, all portray man not as a being of purpose and high destiny, but as the sport of chance, the helpless victim who cries out, as in *Henry IV*, for a sight of the Book of Fate, wherein is shown

how chances mock,  
And changes fill the cup of alteration  
With divers liquors ! O, if this were seen,  
The happiest youth, viewing his progress through,  
What perils past, what crosses to ensue,  
Would shut the book, and sit him down and die.

For such a terrible mood London offered no remedy. For a time Shakespeare seems to have gloried in the city; then he wearied of it, Return to  
Stratford grew disgusted with the stage, and finally, after some twenty-four years (*cir.* 1587-1611), sold his interest in the theaters, shook the dust of London from his feet, and followed his heart back to Stratford. There he adopted the ways of a country gentleman, and there peace and serenity returned to him. He wrote comparatively little after his retirement; but the few plays of this last period, such as *Cymbeline*, *Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, are the mellowest of all his works.

After a brief period of leisure, Shakespeare died at his prime in 1616, and was buried in the parish church of Stratford. Of his great works, now the admiration of the world, he thought so little the Man that he never collected or printed them. From these works many attempts are made to determine the poet's character, beliefs, philosophy,—a difficult matter, since the works portray many types of character and philosophy equally well. The testimony of a few contemporaries is more to the point, and from these we hear that our poet was "very good company," "of such civil demeanor," "of such happy industry," "of such excellent fancy and brave notions," that he won in a somewhat brutal age the characteristic title of "the gentle Shakespeare."

**The Dramas of Shakespeare.** In Shakespeare's day playwrights were producing various types of drama: the chronicle play, representing the glories of English history; the domestic drama, portraying homely scenes and common people; the court comedy (called also Lylian comedy, after the dramatist who developed it), abounding in wit and repartee for the delight of the upper classes; the melodrama, made up of sensational elements thrown together without much plot; the tragedy of blood, centering in one character who struggles amidst woes and



ANNE HATHAWAY'S COTTAGE

horrors; romantic comedy and romantic tragedy, in which men and women were more or less idealized, and in which the elements of love, poetry, romance, youthful imagination and enthusiasm predominated.

It is interesting to note that Shakespeare essayed all these types—the chronicle play in *Henry IV*, the domestic drama in *Merry Wives*, the court comedy in *Love's Labor's Lost*, the melodrama in *Richard III*, the tragedy of blood in *King Lear*, romantic tragedy in *Romeo and Juliet*, romantic comedy in *As You Like It*—and that in each he showed such a mastery as to raise him far above all his contemporaries.

In his experimental period of work (*cir.* 1590-1595) Shakespeare began by revising old plays in conjunction with other **Early Dramas** actors. *Henry VI* is supposed to be an example of such tinkering work. The first part of this play (performed by Shakespeare's company in 1592) was in all probability an older work made over by Shakespeare and some unknown dramatist. From the fact that Joan of Arc appears in the play in two entirely different characters, and is even made



THE MAIN ROOM, ANNE HATHAWAY'S COTTAGE

to do battle at Rouen several years after her death, it is almost certain that *Henry VI* in its present form was composed at different times and by different authors.

*Love's Labor's Lost* is an example of the poet's first independent work. In this play such characters as Holofernes the schoolmaster, Costard the clown and Adriano the fantastic Spaniard are all plainly of the "stock" variety; various rimes and meters are used experimentally; blank verse is not mastered; and some of the songs, such as "On a Day," are more or less artificial. Other plays of this early experimental

period are *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Richard III*, the latter of which shows the influence and, possibly, the collaboration of Marlowe.

In the second period (*cir.* 1595–1600) Shakespeare constructed his plots with better skill, showed a greater mastery of blank verse, created some original characters, and especially did he give free rein to his romantic imagination. All doubt and experiment vanished in the confident enthusiasm of this period, as if Shakespeare felt within himself the coming of the sunrise in *Romeo and Juliet*:

Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day  
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.

Though some of his later plays are more carefully finished, in none of them are we so completely under the sway of poetry and romance as in these early works, written when Shakespeare first felt the thrill of mastery in his art.

In *Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, the practical affairs of life seem to smother its poetic dreams; but note how the dream abides with us after the play is over. The spell of the enchanted forest is broken when the crowd invades its solitude; the witchery of moonlight fades into the light of common day; and then comes Theseus with his dogs to drive not the foxes but the fairies out of the landscape. As Chesterton points out, this masterful man, who has seen no fairies, proceeds to arrange matters in a practical way, with a wedding, a feast and a pantomime, as if these were the chief things of life. So, he thinks, the drama is ended; but after he and his noisy followers have departed to slumber, lo! enter once more Puck, Oberon, Titania and the whole train of fairies, to repeople the ancient world and dance to the music of Mendelssohn:

Hand in hand, with fairy grace,  
While we sing, and bless this place.

So in *The Merchant of Venice* with its tragic figure of Shylock, who is hurried off the stage to make place for a final scene of

love, moonlight and music ; so in every other play of this period, the poetic dream of life triumphs over its practical realities.

During the third period, of maturity of power (*cir.* 1600-1610), Shakespeare was overshadowed by some personal grief or disappointment. He wrote his "farewell to <sup>Third Period</sup> mirth" in *Twelfth Night*, and seems to have reflected his own perturbed state in the lines which he attributes to Achilles in *Troilus and Cressida* :

My mind is troubled, like a fountain stirr'd,  
And I myself see not the bottom of it.

His great tragedies belong to this period, tragedies which reveal increased dramatic power in Shakespeare, but also his loss of hope, his horrible conviction that man is not a free being but a puppet blown about by every wind of fate or circumstance. In *Hamlet* great purposes wait upon a feeble will, and the strongest purpose may be either wrecked or consummated by a trifle. The whole conception of humanity in this play suggests a clock, of which, if but one small wheel is touched, all the rest are thrown into confusion. In *Macbeth* a man of courage and vaulting ambition turns coward or traitor at the appearance of a ghost, at the gibber of witches, at the whisper of conscience, at the taunts of his wife. In *King Lear* a monarch of high disposition drags himself and others down to destruction, not at the stern command of fate, but at the mere suggestion of foolishness. In *Othello* love, faith, duty, the fidelity of a brave man, the loyalty of a pure woman, — all are blasted, wrecked, dishonored by a mere breath of suspicion blown by a villain.

In his final period, of leisurely experiment (*cir.* 1610-1616), Shakespeare seems to have recovered in Stratford the cheerfulness that he had lost in London. He did little work during this period, but that little is of rare charm and sweetness. He no longer portrayed human life as a comedy of errors or a tragedy of weakness but as a glowing romance, as if the mellow autumn of his own life had tinged

all the world with its own golden hues. With the exception of *As You Like It* (written in the second period), in which brotherhood is pictured as the end of life, and love as its unfailing guide, it is doubtful if any of the earlier plays leaves such a wholesome impression as *The Winter's Tale* or *The Tempest*, which were probably the last of the poet's works.

Following is a list of Shakespeare's thirty-four plays (or thirty-seven, counting the different parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry VI*) arranged according to the periods in which they were probably written. The dates are approximate, not exact, and the chronological order is open to question:

FIRST PERIOD, EARLY EXPERIMENT (1590-1595). *Titus Andronicus*, *Henry VI*, *Love's Labor's Lost*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Richard III*, *Richard II*, *King John*.

SECOND PERIOD, DEVELOPMENT (1595-1600). *Romeo and Juliet*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*.

THIRD PERIOD, MATURITY AND TROUBLE (1600-1610). *Twelfth Night*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Timon of Athens*.

FOURTH PERIOD, LATER EXPERIMENT (1610-1616). *Coriolanus*, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, *Henry VIII* (left unfinished, completed probably by Fletcher).

The most convenient arrangement of these plays appears in the First Folio (1623)<sup>1</sup> where they are grouped in three classes **Tragedy and Comedy** called tragedies, comedies and historical plays. The **Tragedy** is a drama in which the characters are the victims of unhappy passions, or are involved in desperate circumstances. The style is grave and dignified, the movement stately; the ending is disastrous to individuals, but illustrates the triumph of a moral principle. These rules of true tragedy are repeatedly set aside by Shakespeare, who introduces elements of buffoonery, and who contrives an ending that may stand for the triumph of a principle but that is quite likely to

<sup>1</sup> This was the first edition of Shakespeare's plays. It was prepared seven years after the poet's death by two of his fellow actors, Heminge and Condell. It contained all the plays now attributed to Shakespeare with the exception of *Pericles*.

be the result of accident or madness. His best tragedies are *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Othello*.

Comedy is a type of drama in which the elements of fun and humor predominate. The style is gay; the action abounds in unexpected incidents; the ending brings ridicule or punishment to the villains in the plot, and satisfaction to all worthy characters. Among the best of Shakespeare's comedies, in which he is apt to introduce serious or tragic elements, are *As You Like It*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*,

*The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*.

Strictly speaking there are only two dramatic types, all others, such as farce, melodrama, trag-i-comedy, lyric drama, or opera, and chronicle play, being modifications of comedy or tragedy. The historical play, to which Elizabethans were devoted, aimed to present great scenes or characters from a past age, and were generally made up of both tragic and comic



CAWDOR CASTLE, SCOTLAND, ASSOCIATED WITH MACBETH

elements. The best of Shakespeare's historical plays are *Julius Cæsar*, *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Richard III* and *Coriolanus*.

There is no better way to feel the power of Shakespeare than to read in succession three different types of plays, such

**What to Read** as the comedy of *As You Like It*, the tragedy of *Macbeth* and the historical play of *Julius Cæsar*. Another excellent trio is *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry IV*; and the reading of these typical plays might well be concluded with *The Tempest*, which was probably Shakespeare's last word to his Elizabethan audience.

**The Quality of Shakespeare.** As the thousand details of a Gothic cathedral receive character and meaning from its towering spire, so all the works of Shakespeare are dominated by his imagination. That imagination of his was both sympathetic and creative. It was sympathetic in that it understood without conscious effort all kinds of men, from clowns to kings, and all human emotions that lie between the extremes of joy and sorrow; it was creative in that, from any given emotion or motive, it could form a human character who should be completely governed by that motive. Ambition in Macbeth, pride in Coriolanus, wit in Mercutio, broad humor in Falstaff, indecision in Hamlet, pure fancy in Ariel, brutality in Richard, a passionate love in Juliet, a merry love in Rosalind, an ideal love in Perdita,—such characters reveal Shakespeare's power to create living men and women from a single motive or emotion.

Or take a single play, *Othello*, and disregarding all minor characters, fix attention on the pure devotion of Desdemona, the jealousy of Othello, the villainy of Iago. The genius that in a single hour can make us understand these contrasting characters as if we had met them in the flesh, and make our hearts ache as we enter into their joy, their anguish, their dishonor, is beyond all ordinary standards of measurement. And *Othello* must be multiplied many times before we reach the limit of Shakespeare's creative imagination. He is like the genii of the *Arabian Nights*, who produce new marvels while we wonder at the old.

Such an overpowering imagination must have created wildly, fancifully, had it not been guided by other qualities: by an observation almost as keen as that of Chaucer, and by the saving grace of humor. We need only mention the latter qualities, for if the reader will examine any great play of Shakespeare, he will surely find them in evidence: the observation keeping the characters of the poet's imagination true to the world of men and women, and the humor preventing some scene of terror or despair from overwhelming us by its terrible reality.

In view of these and other qualities it has become almost a fashion to speak of the "perfection" of Shakespeare's art; but His Faults in truth no word could be more out of place in such a connection. As Ben Jonson wrote in his *Timber*:

"I remember the players have often mentioned it as an honor to Shakespeare that in his writing, whatever he penned, he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, 'Would he had blotted a thousand.'"

Even in his best work Shakespeare has more faults than any other poet of England. He is in turn careless, extravagant, profuse, tedious, sensational; his wit grows stale or coarse; his patriotism turns to bombast; he mars even such pathetic scenes as the burial of Ophelia by buffoonery and brawling; and all to please a public that was given to bull-baiting.

These certainly are imperfections; yet the astonishing thing is that they pass almost unnoticed in Shakespeare. He reflected his age, the evil and the good of it, just as it appeared to him; and the splendor of his representation is such that even his faults have their proper place, like shadows in a sunlit landscape.

Of Shakespeare's philosophy we may say that it reflected equally well the views of his hearers and of the hundred characters whom he created for their pleasure. Of his *His View of Life* personal views it is impossible to say more than this, with truth: that he seems to have been in full sympathy with the older writers whose stories he used as the sources of his drama.<sup>1</sup> Now these stories commonly reflected three things besides the main narrative: a problem, its solution, and the consequent moral or lesson. The problem was a form of evil; its solution depended on goodness in some form; the moral was that goodness triumphs finally and inevitably over evil.

<sup>1</sup> The chief sources of Shakespeare's plays are: (1) Older plays, from which he made half of his dramas, such as *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *King John*. (2) Holinshed's *Chronicles*, from which he obtained material for his English historical plays. (3) Plutarch's *Lives*, translated by North, which furnished him material for *Cesar*, *Coriolanus*, *Antony and Cleopatra*. (4) French, Italian and Spanish romances, in translations, from which he obtained the stories of *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*.

Many such stories were cherished by the Elizabethans, the old tale of "Gammelyn" for example (from which came *As You Like It*) ; and just as in our own day popular novels are dramatized, so three centuries ago audiences demanded to see familiar stories in vigorous action. That is why Shakespeare held to the old tales, and pleased his audience, instead of inventing new plots. But however much he changed the characters or the action of the story, he remained always true to the old moral :

That goodness is the rule of life,  
And its glory and its triumph.

Shakespeare's women are his finest characters, and he often portrays the love of a noble woman as triumphing over the sin or weakness of men. He has little regard for abnormal or degenerate types, such as appear in the later Elizabethan drama ; he prefers vigorous men and pure women, precisely as the old story-tellers did ; and if Richard or some other villain overruns his stage for an hour, such men are finally overwhelmed by the very evil which they had planned for others. If they drag the innocent down to a common destruction, these pure characters never seem to us to perish ; they live forever in our thought as the true emblems of humanity.

It was Charles Lamb who referred to a copy of Shakespeare's plays as "this manly book." The expression is a good one, and epitomizes the judgment of a world which has found that, though Shakespeare introduces evil or vulgar elements into his plays, his emphasis is always upon the right man and the right action. This may seem a trite thing to say in praise of a great genius ; but when you reflect that Shakespeare is read throughout the civilized world, the simple fact that the splendor of his poetry is balanced by the rightness of his message becomes significant and impressive. It speaks not only for Shakespeare but for the moral quality of the multitudes who acknowledge his mastery. Wherever his plays are read, on land or sea, in the crowded cities of men or the far

**Moral  
Emphasis**

silent places of the earth, there the solitary man finds himself face to face with the unchanging ideals of his race, with honor, duty, courtesy, and the moral imperative,

This above all: to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

### THE ELIZABETHAN DRAMA AFTER SHAKESPEARE

The drama began to decline during Shakespeare's lifetime. Even before his retirement to Stratford other popular dramatists appeared who catered to

a vulgar taste by introducing more sensational elements into the stage spectacle. In consequence the drama degenerated so rapidly that in 1642, only twenty-six years after the master dramatist had passed away, Parliament closed the theaters as evil and degrading places. This closing is charged to the zeal of the Puritans, who were rapidly rising into power, and the charge is probably well founded. So also was the Puritan zeal. One who was compelled to read the plays

of the period, to say nothing of witnessing them, must thank these stern old Roundheads for their insistence on public decency and morality. In the drama of all ages there seems to be a terrible fatality which turns the stage first to levity, then to wickedness, and which sooner or later calls for reformation.

Among those who played their parts in the rise and fall of the drama, the chief names are Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher,



FRANCIS BEAUMONT

Middleton, Webster, Heywood, Dekker, Massinger, Ford and Shirley. Concerning the work of these dramatists there is wide diversity of opinion. Lamb regards them, Beaumont and Fletcher especially, as "an inferior sort of Sidneys and Shakespeares." Landor writes of them poetically :

They stood around  
The throne of Shakespeare, sturdy but unclean.

Lowell finds some small things to praise in a large collection of their plays. Hazlitt regards them as "a race of giants, a common and noble brood, of whom Shakespeare was simply the tallest." Dyce, who had an extraordinary knowledge of all these dramatists, regards such praise as absurd, saying that "Shakespeare is not only immeasurably superior to the dramatists of his time, but is utterly unlike them in almost every respect."

We shall not attempt to decide where such doctors disagree. It may not be amiss, however, to record this personal opinion : that these playwrights added little to the drama and still less to literature, and that it is hardly worth while to search out their good passages amid a welter of repulsive details. If they are to be read at all, the student will find enough of their work for comparison with the Shakespearean drama in a book of selections, such as Lamb's *Specimens of English Dramatic Poetry* or Thayer's *The Best Elizabethan Plays*.



JOHN FLETCHER

From the engraving by Philip Oudinet,  
published 1811

**Ben Jonson** (1573?–1637). The greatest figure among these dramatists was Jonson,—“O rare Ben Jonson” as his epitaph describes him, “O rough Ben Jonson” as he was known to the playwrights with whom he waged literary warfare. His first notable play, *Every Man in His Humour*, satirizing the fads or humors of London, was acted by Shakespeare’s company, and Shakespeare played one of the parts. Then Jonson fell out with his fellow actors, and wrote *The Poetaster* (acted

by a rival company) to ridicule them and their work. Shakespeare was silent, but the cudgels were taken up by Marston and Dekker, the latter of whom wrote, among other and better plays, *Satiromastix*, which was played by Shakespeare’s company as a counter attack on Jonson.

The value of Jonson’s plays is that they give us vivid pictures of Elizabethan society, its

BEN JONSON



speech, fashions, amusements, such as no other dramatist has drawn. Shakespeare pictures men and women as they might be in any age; but Jonson is content to picture the men and women of London as they appeared superficially in the year 1600. His chief comedies, which satirize the shams of his age, are: *Volpone, or the Fox*, a merciless exposure of greed and avarice; *The Alchemist*, a study of quackery as it was practiced in Elizabethan days; *Bartholomew Fair*, a riot of folly; and *Epicæne, or the Silent Woman*, which would now be called a roaring farce. His chief tragedies are *Sejanus* and *Catiline*.

In later life Jonson was appointed poet laureate, and wrote many masques, such as the *Masque of Beauty* and the unfinished *Sad Shepherd*. These and a few lyrics, such as the "Triumph of Charis" and the song beginning, "Drink to me only with thine eyes," are the pleasantest of Jonson's works. At the end he abandoned the drama, as Shakespeare had done, and lashed it as severely as any Puritan in the ode beginning, "Come leave the loathéd stage."

#### THE PROSE WRITERS

Unless one have antiquarian tastes, there is little in Elizabethan prose to reward the reader. Strange to say, the most tedious part of it was written by literary men in what was supposed to be a very fine style; while the small part that still attracts us (such as Bacon's *Essays* or Hakluyt's *Voyages*) was mostly written by practical men with no thought for literary effect.

This curious result came about in the following way. In the sixteenth century poetry was old, but English prose was new; for in the two centuries that had elapsed since Mandeville wrote his *Travels*, Malory's *Morte d' Arthur* (1475) and Ascham's *Scholemaster* (1563) are about the only two books that can be said to have a prose style. Then, just as the Elizabethans were turning to literature, John Lyly appeared with his *Euphues, or the Anatomy of Wit* (1578), an alleged novel made up of rambling conversations upon love, education, fashion,—everything that came into the author's head. The style was involved, artificial, tortured; it was loaded with conceits, antitheses and decorations:

"I perceive, Camilla, that be your cloth never so bad it will take some colour, and your cause never so false it will bear some show of probability; wherein you manifest the right nature of a woman, who, having no way to win, thinketh to overcome with words. . . . Take heed, Camilla, that seeking all the wood for a straight stick you choose not at the last a crooked

staff, or prescribing a good counsel to others thou thyself follow the worst, much like to Chius, who selling the best wine to others drank himself of the lees."

This "high fantastical" style, ever since called euphuistic, created a sensation. The age was given over to extravagance, **The Fad of Euphuism** and the artificial elegance of *Euphues* seemed to match the other fashions. Just as Elizabethan men and women began to wear grotesque ruffs about their necks as soon as they learned the art of starching from the Dutch, so now they began to decorate their writing with the conceits of Lyly.<sup>1</sup> Only a year after *Euphues* appeared, Spenser published *The Shepherd's Calendar*, and his prose notes show how quickly the style, like a bad habit, had taken possession of the literary world. Shakespeare ridicules the fashion in the character of Holofernes, in *Love's Labor's Lost*, yet he follows it as slavishly as the rest. He could write good prose when he would, as is shown by a part of Hamlet's speech; but as a rule he makes his characters speak as if the art of prose were like walking a tight rope, which must be done with a balancing pole and some contortions. The scholars who produced the translation of the Scriptures known as the Authorized Version could certainly write well; yet if you examine their Dedication, in which, uninfluenced by the noble sincerity of the Bible's style, they were free to follow the fashion, you may find there the two faults of Elizabethan prose; namely, the habit of servile flattery and the sham of euphuism.

Among prose writers of the period the name that appears most frequently is that of Philip Sidney (1554-1586). He wrote one of our first critical essays, *An Apologie for Poetrie* (cir. 1581), the spirit of which may be judged from the following:

"Nowe therein of all sciences . . . is our poet the monarch. For he dooth not only show the way but giveth so sweete a prospect into the way

<sup>1</sup> Lyly did not invent the fashion; he carried to an extreme a tendency towards artificial writing which was prevalent in England and on the Continent. As is often the case, it was the extreme of fashion that became fashionable.

as will intice any man to enter into it. Nay, he dooth, as if your journey should lie through a faire vineyard, at the first give you a cluster of grapes, that, full of that taste, you may long to passe further. He beginneth not with obscure definitions, which must blur the margent with interpretations, and load the memory with doubtfulnesse; but hee cometh to you with words set in delightfull proportion, either accompanied with or prepared for the well enchaunting skill of musicke; and with a tale, forsooth, he cometh unto you,—with a tale which holdeth children from play and old men from the chimney corner."

Sidney wrote also the pastoral romance *Arcadia* which was famous in its day, and in which the curious reader may find an occasional good passage, such as the prayer to a heathen god, "O All-seeing Light,"—a prayer that became historic and deeply pathetic when King Charles repeated it, facing death on the scaffold. That was in 1649, more than half a century after *Arcadia* was written :

"O all-seeing Light, and eternal Life of all things, to whom nothing is either so great that it may resist or so small that it is contemned, look upon my miserie with thine eye of mercie, and let thine infinite power vouchsafe to limite out some proportion of deliverance unto me, as to thee shall seem most convenient. Let not injurie, O Lord, triumphe over me, and let my faults by thy hands be corrected, and make not mine unjuste enemie the minister of thy justice. But yet, my God, if in thy wisdome this be the aptest chas-tisement for my inexcusable follie ; if this low bondage be fittest for my over-hie desires ; if the pride of my not-inough humble hearte be thus to be broken, O Lord, I yeeld unto thy will, and joyfully embrace what sorrow thou wilt have me suffer."



SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

The finest example of the prose of the period is the King James or Authorized Version of the Bible, which appeared <sup>The King James Bible</sup> in 1611. This translation was so much influenced by the earlier work of Wyclif, Tyndale, and many others, that its style cannot properly be called Elizabethan or Jacobean; it is rather an epitome of English at its best in the two centuries between Chaucer and Shakespeare. The forty-seven scholars who prepared this translation aimed at a faithful rendering of the Book which, aside from its spiritual teaching, contains some of the noblest examples of style in the whole range of human literature: the elemental simplicity of the Books of Moses, the glowing poetry of Job and the Psalms, the sublime imagery of Isaiah, the exquisite tenderness of the Parables, the forged and tempered argument of the Epistles, the gorgeous coloring of the Apocalypse. All these elements entered in some degree into the translation of 1611, and the result was a work of such beauty, strength and simplicity that it remained a standard of English prose for more than three centuries. It has not only been a model for our best writers; it has pervaded all the minor literature of the nation, and profoundly influenced the thought and the expression of the whole English-speaking world.

### FRANCIS BACON (1561-1626)

"My name and memory I leave to foreign nations, and to mine own country *after some time is passed over*," said Bacon in his will. That reference to the future meant, not that England might learn to forget and forgive (for Bacon was not greatly troubled by his disgrace), but that she might learn to appreciate his *Instauratio Magna*. In the same document the philosopher left magnificent bequests for various purposes, but when these were claimed by the beneficiaries it was learned that the debts of the estate were three times the assets. This high-sounding will is an epitome of Bacon's life and work.

**Life.** Bacon belongs with Sidney and Raleigh in that group of Elizabethans who aimed to be men of affairs, politicians, reformers, explorers, rather than writers of prose or poetry. He was of noble birth, and from an early age was attached to Elizabeth's court. There he expected rapid advancement, but the queen and his uncle (Lord Burghley) were both a little suspicious of the young man who, as he said, had "taken all knowledge for his province."

Failing to advance by favor, Bacon studied law and entered Parliament, where he rose rapidly to leadership. Ben Jonson writes of him, in that not very reliable collection of opinions called *Timber*:

"There happened in my time one noble speaker who was full of gravity in his speaking. . . . No man ever spake more neatly, more pressly, more weightily, or suffered less emptiness, less idleness, in what he uttered. . . . The fear of every man that heard him was lest he should make an end."

When Elizabeth died, Bacon saw his way open.

**His Triumph** He offered his services to the royal favorite, Buckingham, and was soon in the good graces of King James. He

was made Baron Verulam and Viscount St. Albans; he married a rich wife; he rose rapidly from one political honor to another, until at sixty he was Lord High Chancellor of England. So his threefold ambition for position, wealth and power was realized. It was while he held the highest state office that he published his *Novum Organum*, which established his reputation as "the first philosopher in Europe." That was in 1620, the year when a handful of Pilgrims sailed away unnoticed on one of the world's momentous voyages.

After four years of power Bacon, who had been engaged with Buckingham in selling monopolies, and in other schemes to be rich



FRANCIS BACON

at the public expense, was brought to task by Parliament. He was accused of receiving bribes, confessed his guilt (it is said to shield the king and Buckingham, who had shared the booty), was His Disgrace fined, imprisoned, banished from court, and forbidden to hold public office again. All these punishments except the last were remitted by King James, to whom Bacon had been a useful tool. His last few years were spent in scientific study at Gorhambury, where he lived proudly, keeping up the appearance of his former grandeur, until his death in 1626.

Such a sketch seems a cold thing, but there is little of divine fire or human warmth in Bacon to kindle one's enthusiasm. His obituary might well be the final word of his essay "Of Wisdom for a Man's Self":

"Whereas they have all their time sacrificed to themselves, they become in the end sacrifices to the inconstancy of fortune, whose wings they thought by their self-wisdom to have pinioned."

Ben Jonson had a different and, possibly, a more just opinion. In the work from which we have quoted he says:

"My conceit of his person was never increased towards him by his place or honours; but I have and do reverence him for his greatness that was only proper to himself, in that he seemed to me ever by his work one of the greatest men, and most worthy of admiration, that had been in many ages. In his adversity I ever prayed that God would give him strength; for greatness he could not want."

**Works of Bacon.** The *Essays* of Bacon are so highly esteemed that the critic Hallam declares it would be "derogatory to a man of the slightest claim to polite letters" to be unacquainted with them. His first venture was a tiny volume called *Essays, Religious Meditations, Places of Persuasion and Dissuasion* (1597). This was modeled upon a French work by Montaigne (*Essais*, 1580) and was considered of small consequence by the author. As time went on, and his ambitious works were overlooked in favor of his sketches, he paid more attention to the latter, revising and enlarging his work until the final edition of fifty-eight essays appeared in 1625. Then it was that Bacon wrote, "I do now publish my Essays, which

of all my works have been most current ; for that, as it seems, they come home to men's business and bosoms."

The spirit of these works may be judged by the essay "Of Friendship." This promises well, for near the beginning we <sup>Quality of</sup> <sub>the Essays</sub> read, "A crowd is not company, and faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talking is but a tinkling cymbal where there is no love." Excellent ! As we read on, however, we find nothing of the love that beareth all things for a friend's sake. We are not even encouraged to be friendly, but rather to cultivate the friendship of other men for the following advantages : that a friend is useful in saving us from solitude ; that he may increase our joy or diminish our trouble ; that he gives us good counsel ; that he can finish our work or take care of our children, if need be ; and finally, that he can spare our modesty while trumpeting our virtues :

" How many things are there which a man cannot, with any face or comeliness, say or do himself ! A man can scarce allege his own merits with modesty, much less extol them ; a man cannot sometimes brook to supplicate or beg ; and a number of the like. But all these things are graceful in a friend's mouth, which are blushing in a man's own."

In old Arabic manuscripts one frequently finds a record having the appearance of truth ; but at the very end, in parenthesis, one reads, " This is all a lie," or " This was my thought when I was sick," or some other enlightening climax. Bacon's essay "Of Friendship" might be more in accord with the verities if it had a final note to the effect that the man who cultivates friendship in the Baconian way will never have or deserve a friend in the world.

So with many other Baconian essays : with " Love " for example, in which we are told that it is impossible for a man to love and be wise ; or with " Negotiations," which informs us that, unless a man intends to use his letter to justify himself (lo ! the politician), it is better to deal by speech than by writing ; for a man can " disavow or expound " his speech, but his written word may be used against him.

To some men, to most men, life offers a problem to be solved by standards that are eternally right; to others life is a game, the object is to win, and the rules may be manipulated to one's own advantage. Bacon's moral philosophy was that of the gamester; his leading motive was self-interest; so when he wrote of love or friendship or any other noble sentiment he was dealing with matters of which he had no knowledge. The best he could offer was a "counsel of prudence," and many will sympathize with John Wesley, who declared that worldly prudence is a quality from which an honest man should pray God to be delivered.

It is only when Bacon deals with practical matters, leaving the high places of life, where he is a stranger, to write of "What to Read course" or "Gardens" or "Seeming Wise" that his essays begin to strike home by their vigor and vitality. Though seldom profound or sympathetic, they are notable for their keen observation and shrewd judgment of the ambitious world in which the author himself lived. Among those that are best worth reading are "Studies," "Wisdom for a Man's Self," "Riches," "Great Place," "Atheism," and "Travel."

The style of these essays is in refreshing contrast to most Elizabethan prose, to the sonorous periods of Hooker, to the ramblings of Sidney, to the conceits of Llyl and Shakespeare. The sentences are mostly short, clear, simple; and so much meaning is crystallized in them that they overshadow even the "Poor Richard" maxims of Franklin, the man who had a genius for packing worldly wisdom into a convenient nutshell.

Other works of Bacon are seldom read, and may be passed over lightly. We mention only, as indicative of his wide range, his *History of Henry VII*, his Utopian romance *The New Atlantis*, his *Advancement of Learning* and his *Novum Organum*. The last two works, one in English, the other in Latin, were parts of the *Instauratio Magna*, or *The Great Institution of True Philosophy*, a colossal work which Bacon did not finish, which he never even outlined very clearly.

The aim of the *Instauratio* was, first, to sweep away ancient philosophy and the classic education of the universities ; and second, to substitute a scheme of scientific study to the end of discovering and utilizing the powers of nature. It gave Bacon his reputation (in Germany especially) of a great philosopher and scientist, and it is true that his vision of vast discoveries has influenced the thought of the world ; but to read any part of his great work is to meet a mind that seems ingenious rather than philosophical, and fanciful rather than scientific. He had what his learned contemporary Peter Heylyn termed "a chymical brain," a brain that was forever busy with new theories ; and the leading theory was that some lucky man would discover a key or philosopher's stone or magic *sesame* that must straightway unlock all the secrets of nature.

Meanwhile the real scientists of his age were discovering secrets in the only sure way, of hard, self-denying work. Gilbert was studying magnetism, Harvey discovering the circulation of the blood, Kepler determining the laws that govern the planets' motions, Napier inventing logarithms, and Galileo standing in ecstasy beneath the first telescope ever pointed at the stars of heaven.

Of the work of these scientific heroes Bacon had little knowledge, and for their plodding methods he had no sympathy. He was Viscount, Lord Chancellor, "high-browed Verulam," and his heaven-scaling *Instauratio* which, as he said, was "for the glory of the Creator and for the relief of man's estate" must have something stupendous, Elizabethan, about it, like the victory over the Armada. In his plans there was always an impression of vastness ; his miscellaneous works were like the strange maps that geographers made when the wonders of a new world opened upon their vision. Though he never made an important discovery, his conviction that knowledge is power and that there are no metes or bounds to knowledge, his belief that the mighty forces of nature are waiting to do man's bidding, his thought of ships that navigate

*His Vast Plans*

the air as easily as the sea,—all this Baconian dream of mental empire inspired the scientific world for three centuries. It was as thoroughly Elizabethan in its way as the voyage of Drake or the plays of Shakespeare.

**Summary.** The most remarkable feature of the Elizabethan age was its patriotic enthusiasm. This enthusiasm found its best expression on the stage, in the portrayal of life in vigorous action; and dramas were produced in such number and of such quality that the whole period is sometimes called the age of the play. It was a time of poetry rather than of prose, and nearly all of the poetry is characterized by its emotional quality, by youthful freshness of feeling, by quickened imagination, and by an extravagance of language which overflows, even in Shakespeare, in a kind of glorious bombast.

Our study of the literature of the age includes: (1) The outburst of lyric poetry. (2) The life and works of Spenser, second in time of the great English poets. (3) A review of the long history of the drama, from the earliest church spectacle, through miracle, morality, interlude, pageant and masque to the Elizabethan drama. (4) The immediate forerunners of Shakespeare, of whom the most notable was Marlowe. (5) The life and work of Shakespeare. (6) Ben Jonson, the successors of Shakespeare, and the rapid decline of the drama. (7) Elizabethan prose; the appearance of euphuism; Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie*; the Authorized Version of the Scriptures; and the life and work of Francis Bacon.

**Selections for Reading.** Selected lyrics in Manly, English Poetry; Newcomer, Twelve Centuries of English Poetry and Prose; Palgrave, Golden Treasury; Schilling, Elizabethan Lyrics; Ward, English Poets.

**Spenser.** Selected poems in Temple Classics, Cambridge Poets Series. Selections from The Faery Queen in Standard English Classics and other school editions. (See Texts, in General Bibliography.)

**Early Drama.** A miracle play, such as Noah, may be read in Manly, Specimens of Pre-Shakespearean Drama (Ginn and Company). Marlowe's plays in Everyman's Library; his Edward II in Holt's English Readings; his Faustus in Temple Dramatists, and in Mermaid Series.

**Shakespeare.** Several editions of Shakespeare's plays, such as the revised Hudson (Ginn and Company) and the Neilson (Scott) are available. Single plays, such as Julius Caesar, Merchant of Venice, Macbeth, As You Like It, are edited for class use in Standard English Classics, Lake Classics, and various other school series. The Sonnets in Athenaeum Press Series.

**Ben Jonson.** The Alchemist in Cambridge Poets Series; also in Thayer, Best Elizabethan Plays (Ginn and Company), which includes in one volume plays by Marlowe, Jonson, Webster, Beaumont and Fletcher.

*Prose Writers.* Selections from Bacon's Essays in Riverside Literature or Maynard's English Classics. The Essays complete in Everyman's Library. Selections from Hooker, Sidney and Llyl in Manly, English Prose, or Craik, English Prose. Ampler selections in Garnett, English Prose from Elizabeth to Victoria (Ginn and Company), which contains in one volume typical works of 33 prose writers from Llyl to Carlyle. Hakluyt's Voyages in Everyman's Library.

*Bibliography. History.* Creighton, *The Age of Elizabeth*; Winter, *Shakespeare's England*; Goadby, *The England of Shakespeare*; Harrison, *Elizabethan England*; Spedding, *Francis Bacon and his Times*; Lee, *Great Englishmen of the Sixteenth Century*; Payne, *Voyages of Elizabethan Seamen*.

*Literature.* Saintsbury, *Short History of Elizabethan Literature*; Seccombe and Allen, *The Age of Shakespeare*; Whipple, *Literature of the Age of Elizabeth*; Schilling, *Elizabethan Lyrics*; Lee, *Elizabethan Sonnets*; Sheavyn, *Literary Profession in the Elizabethan Age*.

*Spenser.* Life, by Church (English Men of Letters Series). Carpenter, *Outline Guide to the Study of Spenser*; Craik, *Spenser and his Times*. Essays, by Lowell, in *Among My Books*; by Dowden, in *Transcripts and Studies*; by Hazlitt, in *Lectures on the English Poets*; by Leigh Hunt, in *Imagination and Fancy*.

*The Drama.* Gayley, *Plays of Our Forefathers* (a study of the early drama); Evans, *English Masques*; Bates, *The English Religious Drama*; Schilling, *The Elizabethan Drama*; Symonds, *Shakespeare's Predecessors in the English Drama*; Boas, *Shakespeare and his Predecessors*; Collier, *History of English Dramatic Poetry*; Ward, *English Dramatic Literature*; Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*; Pollard, *English Miracle Plays, Moralities and Interludes*.

*Shakespeare.* Life, by Raleigh (E. M. of L.), by Lee, by Halliwell-Phillipps, by Brandes. Dowden, *A Shakespeare Primer*; Dowden, *Shakespeare: a Critical Study of his Mind and Art*; Baker, *Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist*.

*Other Dramatists.* Lowell, *Old English Dramatists*; Lamb, *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets*; Fleay, *Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama*; Ingram, *Christopher Marlowe*.

*Prose Writers.* Church, *Life of Bacon* (E. M. of L.); Nicol, *Bacon's Life and Philosophy*; Macaulay, *Essay on Bacon*. Symonds, *Life of Sidney* (E. M. of L.); Bourne, *Life of Sidney* (Heroes of the Nations Series). Stebbing, *Life of Raleigh*.

*Fiction and Poetry.* Kingsley, *Westward Ho*; Black, *Judith Shakespeare*; Scott, *Kenilworth*; Schiller, *Maria Stuart*; Alfred Noyes, *Drake*; Bates and Coman, *English History Told by English Poets*.

## CHAPTER V

## THE PURITAN AGE AND THE RESTORATION (1625-1700)

**Historical Outline.** The period from the accession of Charles I in 1625 to the Revolution of 1688 was filled with a mighty struggle over the question whether king or Commons should be supreme in England. On this question the English people were divided into two main parties. On one side were the Royalists, or Cavaliers, who upheld the monarch with his theory of the divine right of kings; on the other were the Puritans, or Independents, who stood for the rights of the individual man and for the liberties of Parliament and people. The latter party was at first very small, it had appeared in the days of Langland and Wyclif, and had been persecuted by Elizabeth; but persecution served only to increase its numbers and determination. Though the Puritans were never a majority in England, they soon ruled the land with a firmness it had not known since the days of William the Conqueror. They were primarily men of conscience, and no institution can stand before strong men whose conscience says the institution is wrong. That is why the degenerate theaters were not reformed but abolished; that is why the theory of the divine right of kings was shattered as by a thunderbolt when King Charles was sent to the block for treason against his country.

The struggle reached a climax in the Civil War of 1642, which ended in a Puritan victory. As a result of that war, England was for a brief period a commonwealth, disciplined at home and respected abroad, through the genius and vigor and tyranny of Oliver Cromwell.

When Cromwell died (1658) there was no man in England strong enough to take his place, and two years later "Prince Charlie," who had long been an exile, was recalled to the throne as Charles II of England. He had learned nothing from his father's fate or his own experience, and proceeded by all evil ways to warrant this "Epitaph," which his favorite, Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, pinned on the door of his bedchamber :

Here lies our Sovereign Lord the King,  
Whose word no man relies on,  
Who never said a foolish thing,  
Nor ever did a wise one.

The next twenty years are of such disgrace and national weakness that the historian hesitates to write about them. It was called the period of the Restoration, which meant, in effect, the restoration of all that was objectionable in monarchy. Another crisis came in the Revolution of 1688, when the country, aroused by the attempt of James II to establish another despotism in Church and state, invited Prince William of Orange (husband of the king's daughter Mary) to the English throne. That revolution meant three things: the supremacy of Parliament, the beginning of modern England, and the final triumph of the principle of political liberty for which the Puritan had fought and suffered hardship for a hundred years.

**Typical Writers.** Among the writers of the period three men stand out prominently, and such was the confusion of the times that in the whole range of our literature it would be difficult to find three others who differ more widely in spirit or method. Milton represents the scholarship, the culture of the Renaissance, combined with the moral earnestness of the Puritan. Bunyan, a poor tinker and lay preacher, reflects the tremendous spiritual ferment among the common people. And Dryden, the cool, calculating author who made a business of writing, regards the Renaissance and Puritanism as both things of the past. He lives in the present, aims to give readers what they like, follows the French critics of the period who advocate writing by rule, and popularizes that cold, formal, precise style which, under the assumed name of classicism, is to dominate English poetry during the following century.

## JOHN MILTON (1608-1674)

Yet some there be that by due steps aspire  
To lay their just hands on that golden key  
That opes the palace of eternity:  
To such my errand is.

In these words of the Attendant Spirit in *Comus* we seem to hear Milton speaking to his readers. To such as regard poetry as the means of an hour's pleasant recreation he brings no message; his "errand" is to those who, like Sidney, regard poetry as the handmaiden of virtue, or, like Aristotle, as the highest form of human history.

**Life.** Milton was born in London (1608) at a time when Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists were in their glory. He grew up in a home where the delights of poetry and music were added to the moral discipline of the Puritan. Before he was twelve years old he had formed the habit of studying far into the night; and his field included not only Greek, Latin, Hebrew and modern European literatures, but mathematics also, and science and theology and music. His parents had devoted him in infancy to noble ends, and he joyously accepted their dedication, saying, "He who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well . . . ought himself to be a true poem, that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honorablest things."

From St. Paul's school Milton went to Christ's College, Cambridge, took his master's degree, wrote a few poems in Latin, Italian and Milton at English, and formed a plan for a great epic, "a poem that Horton England would not willingly let die." Then he retired to his father's country-place at Horton, and for six years gave himself up to music, to untutored study, and to that formal pleasure in nature which is reflected in his work. Five short poems were the only literary result of this retirement, but these were the most perfect of their kind that England had thus far produced.

Milton's next step, intended like all others to cultivate his talent, took him to the Continent. For fifteen months he traveled through France and Italy, and was about to visit Greece when, hearing of the struggle between king and Parliament, he set his face towards England again. "For I thought it base," he said, "to be traveling at my ease for culture when my countrymen at home were fighting for liberty."

To find himself, or to find the service to which he could devote his great learning, seems to have been Milton's object after his return to **Home Life** London (1639). While he waited he began to educate his nephews, and enlarged this work until he had a small private school, in which he tested some of the theories that appeared later in his *Tractate on Education*. Also he married, in haste it seems, and with deplorable consequences. His wife, Mary Powell, the daughter of a Cavalier, was a pleasure-loving young woman, and after a brief experience of Puritan discipline she wearied of it and went home. She has been amply criticized for her desertion, but Milton's house must have been rather chilly for any ordinary human being to find comfort in. To him woman seemed to have been made for obedience, and man for rebellion; his toplofty doctrine of masculine superiority found expression in a line regarding Adam and Eve, "He for God only, she for God in him,"—an old delusion, which had been seriously disturbed by the first woman.

For a period of near twenty years Milton wrote **Period of Controversy** but little poetry, his time being occupied with controversies that were then waged even more fiercely in the press than in the field. It was after the execution of King Charles (1649), when England was stunned and all Europe aghast at the Puritans' daring, that he published his *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, the argument of which was, that magistrates and people are equally subject to the law, and that the divine right of kings to rule is as nothing beside the divine right of the people to defend their liberties. That argument established Milton's position as the literary champion of democracy. He was chosen Secretary of the Commonwealth, his duties being to prepare the Latin correspondence with foreign countries, and to confound



JOHN MILTON

all arguments of the Royalists. During the next decade Milton's pen and Cromwell's sword were the two outward bulwarks of Puritanism, and one was quite as ready and almost as potent as the other.

It was while Milton was thus occupied that he lost his eyesight, "his last sacrifice on the altar of English liberty." His famous "Sonnet on his Blindness" is a lament not for his lost sight but for his lost talent; for while serving the Commonwealth he must abandon the dream of a great poem that he had cherished all his life:

When I consider how my light is spent  
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,  
And that one talent, which is death to hide,  
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent  
To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
My true account, lest he returning chide;  
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"  
I fondly ask; but Patience, to prevent  
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need  
Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best  
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state  
Is kingly: thousands at his bidding speed,  
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;  
They also serve who only stand and wait."

With the Restoration (1660) came disaster to the blind Puritan poet, who had written too harshly against Charles I to be forgiven by Charles II. He was forced to hide; his property was confiscated; his works were burned in public by the hangman; had not his fame as a writer raised up powerful friends, he would have gone to the scaffold when Cromwell's bones were taken from the grave and hanged in impotent revenge. He was finally allowed to settle in a modest house, and to be in peace so long as he remained in obscurity. So the pen was silenced that had long been a scourge to the enemies of England.

His home life for the remainder of his years impresses us by its loneliness and grandeur. He who had delighted as a poet in the English country, and more delighted as a Puritan in the fierce struggle for liberty, was now confined to a small house, going from study to porch, and finding both in equal darkness. He who had roamed as a master through the wide fields of literature was now dependent on a chance reader. His soul also was afflicted by the

apparent loss of all that Puritanism had so hardly won, by the degradation of his country, by family troubles; for his daughters often rebelled at the task of taking his dictation, and left him helpless. Saddest of all, there was no love in the house, for with all his genius Milton could not inspire affection in his own people; nor does he ever reach the heart of his readers.

In the midst of such scenes, denied the pleasure of hope, Milton seems to have lived largely in his memories. He took up his early His dream of an immortal epic, lived with it seven years in Masterpiece seclusion, and the result was *Paradise Lost*. This epic is generally considered the finest fruit of Milton's genius, but there are two other poems that have a more personal and human significance.



COTTAGE AT CHALFONT, ST. GILES, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Where Milton lived during the Plague, and where *Paradise Lost* was written

In the morning of his life he had written *Comus*, and the poem is a reflection of a noble youth whose way lies open and smiling before him. Almost forty years later, or just before his death in 1674, he wrote *Samson Agonistes*, and in this tragedy of a blind giant, bound, captive, but unconquerable, we have a picture of the agony and moral grandeur of the poet who takes leave of life:

I feel my genial spirits droop, . . .  
 My race of glory run, and race of shame;  
 And I shall shortly be with them that rest.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From Milton's *Samson*. For the comparison we are indebted to Henry Reed *Lectures on English Literature* (1863), p. 223.

**The Early Poems.** Milton's first notable poem, written in college days, was the "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity," a chant of victory and praise such as Pindar might have written had he known the meaning of Christmas. In this boyish work one may find the dominant characteristic of all Milton's poetry; namely, a blending of learning with piety, a devotion of all the treasures of classic culture to the service of religion.

Among the earliest of the Horton poems (so-called because they were written in the country-place of that name) are "L'Allegro" and "Il Pensero," two of the most widely quoted works in our literature. They should be read in order to understand what people have admired for nearly three hundred years, if not for their own beauty. "L'Allegro" (from the Italian, meaning "the cheerful man") is the poetic expression of a happy state of mind, and "Il Pensero"<sup>1</sup> of a quiet, thoughtful mood that verges upon sadness, like the mood that follows good music. Both poems are largely inspired by nature, and seem to have been composed out of doors, one in the morning and the other in the evening twilight.

*Comus* (1634), another of the Horton poems, is to many readers the most interesting of Milton's works. In form it is **The Masque of Comus** a masque, that is, a dramatic poem intended to be staged to the accompaniment of music; in execution it is the most perfect of all such poems inspired by the Elizabethan love of pageants. We may regard it, therefore, as a late echo of the Elizabethan drama, which, like many another echo, is sweeter though fainter than the original. It was performed at Ludlow Castle, before the Earl of Bridgewater, and was suggested by an accident to the Earl's children, a simple accident, in which Milton saw the possibility of "turning the common dust of opportunity to gold."

<sup>1</sup> The name is generally translated into "melancholy," but the latter term is now commonly associated with sorrow or disease. To Milton "melancholy" meant "pensiveness." In writing "Il Pensero" he was probably influenced by a famous book, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which appeared in 1621 and was very widely read.

The story is that of a girl who becomes separated from her brothers in a wood, and is soon lost. The magician Comus<sup>1</sup> appears with his band of revelers, and tries to bewitch the girl, to make her like one of his own brutish followers. She is protected by her own purity, is watched over by the Attendant Spirit, and finally rescued by her brothers. The story is somewhat like that of the old ballad of "The Children in the Wood," but it is here transformed into a kind of morality play.

In this masque may everywhere be seen the influence of Milton's predecessors and the stamp of his own independence; Comus and his Puritan spirit also, which must add a moral to *The Tempest* the old pagan tales. Thus, Miranda wandering about the enchanted isle (in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*) hears strange, harmonious echoes, to which Caliban gives expression :

The isle is full of noises,  
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.  
Sometimes a thousand twanging instruments  
Will hum about mine ears, and sometimes voices,  
That, if I then had waked after long sleep,  
Will make me sleep again; and then, in dreaming,  
The clouds methought would open and show riches  
Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked  
I cried to dream again.

The bewildered girl in *Comus* also hears mysterious voices, and has glimpses of a world not her own; but, like Sir Guyon of *The Faery Queen*, she is on moral guard against all such deceptions :

A thousand phantasies  
Begin to throng into my memory,  
Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire,  
And airy tongues that syllable men's names  
On sands and shores and desert wildernesses.  
These thoughts may startle well but not astound  
The virtuous mind, that ever walks attended  
By a strong-siding champion, Conscience.

<sup>1</sup> In mythology Comus, the god of revelry, was represented as the son of Dionysus (Bacchus, god of wine), and the witch Circe. In Greek poetry Comus is the leader of any gay band of satyrs or dancers. Milton's masque of *Comus* was influenced by a similar story in Peele's *Old Wives' Tale*, by Spenser's "Palace of Pleasure" in *The Faery Queen* (see p. 72), and by Homer's story of the witch Circe in the *Odyssey*.

Again, in *The Tempest* we meet "the frisky spirit" Ariel, who sings of his coming freedom from Prospero's service :

Where the bee sucks, there suck I :  
 In a cowslip's bell I lie ;  
 There I couch when owls do cry.  
 On a bat's back I do fly  
 After summer merrily :  
 Merrily, merrily shall I live now  
 Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.

The Attendant Spirit in *Comus* has something of Ariel's gayety, but his joy is deeper-seated ; he serves not the magician Prospero

but the Almighty, and comes gladly to earth in fulfilment of the divine promise, "He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways." When his work is done he vanishes, like Ariel, but with a song which shows the difference between the



LUDLOW CASTLE

Elizabethan, or Renaissance, conception of sensuous beauty (that is, beauty which appeals to the physical senses) and the Puritan's idea of moral beauty, which appeals to the soul :

Now my task is smoothly done,  
 I can fly or I can run  
 Quickly to the green earth's end,  
 Where the bowed welkin slow doth bend,  
 And from thence can soar as soon  
 To the corners of the moon.  
 Mortals, that would follow me,  
 Love Virtue ; she alone is free :  
 She can teach ye how to climb  
 Higher than the sphery chime ;  
 Or if Virtue feeble were,  
 Heaven itself would stoop to her.

*Lycidas* (1637), last of the Horton poems, is an elegy occasioned by the death of one who had been Milton's fellow student at Cambridge. It was an old college custom to celebrate important events by publishing a collection of Latin or English poems, and *Lycidas* may be regarded as Milton's wreath, which he offered to the memory of his classmate and to his university. The poem is beautifully fashioned, and is greatly admired for its classic form; but it is cold as any monument, without a touch of human grief or sympathy. Probably few modern readers will care for it as they care for Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, a less perfect elegy, but one into which love enters as well as art. Other notable English elegies are the *Thyrsis* of Matthew Arnold and the *Adonais* of Shelley.

**Milton's Left Hand.** This expression was used by Milton to designate certain prose works written in the middle period of his life, at a time of turmoil and danger. These works have magnificent passages which show the power and the harmony of our English speech, but they are marred by other passages of bitter raillery and invective. The most famous of all these works is the noble plea called *Areopagitica*:<sup>1</sup> *a Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing* (1644).

There was a law in Milton's day forbidding the printing of any work until it had been approved by the official Licenser of Books. Such a law may have been beneficial at times, but during the seventeenth century it was another instrument of tyranny, since no Licenser would allow anything to be printed against his particular church or government. When *Areopagitica* was written the Puritans of the Long Parliament were virtually rulers of England, and Milton pleaded with his own party for the free expression of every honest opinion, for liberty in all wholesome pleasures, and for tolerance in religious matters. His stern confidence in truth, that she will not

<sup>1</sup> From the Areopagus or forum of Athens, the place of public appeal. This was the "Mars Hill" from which St. Paul addressed the Athenians, as recorded in the Book of Acts.

be weakened but strengthened by attack, is summarized in the famous sentence, "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue."

Two interesting matters concerning *Areopagitica* are: first, that this eloquent plea for the freedom of printing had to be issued in defiance of law, without a license; and second, that Milton was himself, a few years later, under Cromwell's iron government, a censor of the press.

Milton's rare sonnets seem to belong to this middle period of strife, though some of them were written earlier. Since *Wyatt and Surrey* had brought the Italian sonnet to

**The Sonnets** England this form of verse had been employed to sing of love; but with Milton it became a heroic utterance, a trumpet Wordsworth calls it, summoning men to virtue, to patriotism, to stern action. The most personal of these sonnets are "On Having Arrived at the Age of Twenty-three," "On his Blindness" and "To Cyriack Skinner"; the most romantic is "To the Nightingale"; others that are especially noteworthy are "On the Late Massacre," "On his Deceased Wife"<sup>1</sup> and "To Cromwell." The spirit of these sonnets, in contrast with those of Elizabethan times, is finely expressed by Landor in the lines:

Few his words, but strong,  
And sounding through all ages and all climes;  
He caught the sonnet from the dainty hand  
Of Love, who cried to lose it, and he gave the notes  
To Glory.

**Milton's Later Poetry.**<sup>2</sup> It was in 1658, the year of Cromwell's death, when the political power of Puritanism was tottering, that Milton in his blindness began to write *Paradise Lost*. After stating his theme he begins his epic, as Virgil began the *Aeneid*, in the midst of the action; so that in reading his

<sup>1</sup> This beautiful sonnet was written to his second wife, not to Mary Powell.

<sup>2</sup> The three poems of Milton's later life are *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. The last-named has been referred to on page 119. *Paradise Regained* contains some noble passages, but is inferior to *Paradise Lost*, on which the poet's fame chiefly rests.

first book it is well to have in mind an outline of the whole story, which is as follows :

The scene opens in Heaven, and the time is before the creation of the world. The archangel Lucifer rebels against the Almighty, and gathers to his banner an immense company of the heavenly hosts, of Plan of Paradise Lost angels and flaming cherubim. A stupendous three days' battle follows between rebel and loyal legions, the issue being in doubt until the Son goes forth in his chariot of victory. Lucifer and his rebels are defeated, and are hurled over the ramparts of Heaven. Down, down through Chaos they fall " nine times the space that measures day and night," until they reach the hollow vaults of Hell.

In the second act (for *Paradise Lost* has some dramatic as well as epic construction) we follow the creation of the earth in the midst of the universe; and herein we have an echo of the old belief that the earth was the center of the solar system. Adam and Eve are formed to take in the Almighty's affection the place of the fallen angels. They live happily in Paradise, watched over by celestial guardians. Meanwhile Lucifer and his followers are plotting revenge in Hell. They first boast valiantly, and talk of mighty war; but the revenge finally degenerates into a base plan to tempt Adam and Eve and win them over to the fallen hosts.

The third act shows Lucifer, now called Satan or the Adversary, with his infernal peers in Pandemonium, plotting the ruin of the world. He makes an astounding journey through Chaos, disguises himself in various forms of bird or beast in order to watch Adam and Eve, is detected by Ithuriel and the guardian angels, and is driven away. Thereupon he haunts vast space, hiding in the shadow of the earth until his chance comes, when he creeps back into Eden by means of an underground river. Disguising himself as a serpent, he meets Eve and tempts her with the fruit of a certain "tree of knowledge," which she has been forbidden to touch. She eats the fruit and shares it with Adam; then the pair are discovered in their disobedience, and are banished from Paradise.<sup>1</sup>

It is evident from this outline that Milton uses material from two different sources, one an ancient legend which Cædmon employed in his Paraphrase, the other the Milton's Materials Bible narrative of Creation. Though the latter is but a small part of the epic, it is as a fixed center about which all other interests are supposed to revolve. In reading

<sup>1</sup> In the above outline we have arranged the events in the order in which they are supposed to have occurred. Milton tells the story in a somewhat confused way. The order of the twelve books of *Paradise Lost* is not the natural or dramatic order of the story.

*Paradise Lost*, therefore, with its vast scenes and colossal figures, one should keep in mind that every detail was planned by Milton to be closely related to his central theme, which is the fall of man.

In using such diverse materials Milton met with difficulties, some of which (the character of Lucifer, for example) were too great for his limited dramatic powers. In Books I and II Lucifer is a magnificent figure, the proudest in all literature, a rebel with something of celestial grandeur about him :

" Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,"  
Said then the lost Archangel, " this the seat  
That we must change for Heaven ? this mournful gloom  
For that celestial light ? Be it so, since he  
Who now is sovran can dispose and bid  
What shall be right : farthest from him is best,  
Whom reason hath equalled, force hath made supreme  
Above his equals. Farewell, happy fields,  
Where joy forever dwells ! Hail, horrors ! hail,  
Infernal world ! and thou, profoundest Hell,  
Receive thy new possessor, one who brings  
A mind not to be changed by place or time.  
The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.  
What matter where, if I be still the same,  
And what I should be, all but less than he  
Whom thunder hath made greater ? Here at least  
We shall be free ; the Almighty hath not built  
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence ;  
Here we may reign secure ; and in my choice  
To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell :  
Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven."

In other books of *Paradise Lost* the same character appears not as the heroic rebel but as the sneaking "father of lies," all his grandeur gone, creeping as a snake into Paradise or sitting in the form of an ugly toad "squat at Eve's ear," whispering petty deceits to a woman while she sleeps. It is probable that Milton meant to show here the moral results of rebellion, but there is little in his poem to explain the sudden degeneracy from Lucifer to Satan.

The reader will note, also, the strong contrast between Milton's matter and his manner. His matter is largely mythical, and the myth is not beautiful or even interesting, but childish for the most part and frequently grotesque, as when cannon are used in the battle of the angels, or when the Almighty makes plans,

Lest unawares we lose  
This our high place, our sanctuary, our hill.

Indeed, all Milton's celestial figures, with the exception of the original Lucifer, are as banal as those of the old miracle plays; and his Adam and Eve are dull, wooden figures that serve merely to voice the poet's theology or moral sentiments.

In contrast with this unattractive matter, Milton's manner is always and unmistakably "the grand manner." His imagination is lofty, his diction noble, and the epic of *Paradise Lost* is so filled with memorable lines, with gorgeous descriptions, with passages of unexampled majesty or harmony or eloquence, that the crude material which he injects into the Bible narrative is lost sight of in our wonder at his superb style.

**The Quality of Milton.** If it be asked, What is Milton's adjective? the word "sublime" rises to the lips as the best expression of his style. This word (from the Latin *sublimis*, meaning "exalted above the ordinary") is hard to define, but may be illustrated from one's familiar experience.

You stand on a hilltop overlooking a mighty landscape on which the new snow has just fallen: the forest bending beneath its soft burden, the fields all white and still, the air scintillating with light and color, the whole world so clean and pure that it seems as if God had blotted out its imperfections and adorned it for his own pleasure. That is a sublime spectacle, and the soul of man is exalted as he looks upon it. Or here in your own village you see a woman who enters a room where a child is stricken with a deadly and contagious disease. She immolates herself for the suffering one, cares for him and saves him, then lays down her own life. That is a sublime act. Or you hear of a young patriot captured and hanged by the enemy, and as they lead him forth to death he says, "I regret that I have but one life to give to my country." That is a sublime expression, and the feeling in your heart as you hear it is one of moral sublimity.

The writer who lifts our thought and feeling above their ordinary level, who gives us an impression of outward grandeur or of moral exaltation, is a sublime writer, has a **Sublimity** sublime style; and Milton more than any other poet deserves the adjective. His scenes are immeasurable; mountain, sea and forest are but his playthings; his imagination hesitates not to paint Chaos, Heaven, Hell, the widespread Universe in which our world hangs like a pendant star and across which stretches the Milky Way:

A broad and ample road, whose dust is gold,  
And pavement stars.

No other poet could find suitable words for such vast themes, but Milton never falters. Read the assembly of the fallen hosts before Lucifer in Book I of *Paradise Lost*, or the opening of Hellgates in Book II, or the invocation to light in Book III, or Satan's invocation to the sun in Book IV, or the morning hymn of Adam and Eve in Book V; or open *Paradise Lost* anywhere, and you shall soon find some passage which, by the grandeur of its scene or by the exalted feeling of the poet as he describes it, awakens in you the feeling of sublimity.

The harmony of Milton's verse is its second notable quality. Many of our poets use blank verse, as many other people walk, **Harmony** as if they had no sense of rhythm within them; but Milton, by reason of his long study and practice of music, seems to be always writing to melody. In consequence it is easy to read his most prolix passages, as it is easy to walk over almost any kind of ground if one but keeps step to outward or inward music. Not only is Milton's verse stately and melodious, but he is a perfect master of words, choosing them for their sound as well as for their sense, as a musician chooses different instruments to express different emotions. Note these contrasting descriptions of so simple a matter as the opening of gates:

Heaven opened wide  
Her ever-during gates, harmonious sound,  
On golden hinges moving.

On a sudden open fly  
With impetuous recoil and jarring sound  
Th' infernal doors, and on their hinges grate  
Harsh thunder.

In dealing with a poet of such magnificent qualities one should be wary of criticism. That Milton's poetry has little human interest, no humor, and plenty of faults may be granted. His *Paradise Lost* especially is overcrowded with mere learning or pedantry in one place and with pompous commonplaces in another. But such faults appear trivial, unworthy of mention in the presence of a poem that is as a storehouse from which the authors and statesmen of three hundred years have drawn their choicest images and expressions. It stands forever as our supreme example of sublimity and harmony,—that sublimity which reflects the human spirit standing awed and reverent before the grandeur of the universe; that harmony of expression at which every great poet aims and which Milton attained in such measure that he is called the organ-voice of England.

### JOHN BUNYAN (1628-1688)

There is a striking contrast between the poet and the prose writer of the Puritan age. Milton the poet is a man of culture, familiar with the best literature of all ages; Bunyan the prose writer is a poor, self-taught laborer who reads his Bible with difficulty, stumbling over the hard passages. Milton writes for the cultivated classes, in harmonious verse adorned with classic figures; Bunyan speaks for common men in sinewy prose, and makes his meaning clear by homely illustrations drawn from daily life. Milton is a solitary and austere figure, admirable but not lovable; Bunyan is like a familiar acquaintance, ruddy-faced, clear-eyed, who wins us by his sympathy, his friendliness, his good sense and good humor. He is known as the author of one book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but that book has probably had more readers than any other that England has ever produced.

**Life.** During Bunyan's lifetime England was in a state of religious ferment or revival, and his experience of it is vividly portrayed in a remarkable autobiography called *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. In reading this book we find that his life is naturally separated into two periods. His youth was a time of struggle with doubts and temptations; his later years were characterized by inward peace and tireless labor. His peace meant that he was saved, his labor that he must save others. Here, in a word, is the secret of all his works.

He was born (1628) in the village of Elstow, Bedfordshire, and was the son of a poor tinker. He was sent to school long enough to learn

elementary reading and writing; then he followed the tinker's trade; but at the age of sixteen, being offended at his father's second marriage, he ran away and joined the army.

As a boy Bunyan had a vivid but morbid imagination, which led him to terrible doubts, fears, fits of despondency, hallucinations. On such a nature the emotional religious revivals of the age made a tremendous impression. He followed them for years, living in a state of torment, until he felt himself converted; whereupon he turned preacher and began to call other sinners to repen-

JOHN BUNYAN

ance. Such were his native power and rude eloquence that, wherever he went, the common people thronged to hear him.

After the Restoration all this was changed. Public meetings were forbidden unless authorized by bishops of the Established Church, and **In Bedford Jail** Bunyan was one of the first to be called to account. When ordered to hold no more meetings he refused to obey, saying that when the Lord called him to preach salvation he would listen only to the Lord's voice. Then he was thrown into Bedford jail. During his imprisonment he supported his family by making shoe laces, and wrote *Grace Abounding* and *The Pilgrim's Progress*.



After his release Bunyan became the most popular writer and preacher in England. He wrote a large number of works, and went cheerfully up and down the land, preaching the gospel to the poor, helping the afflicted, doing an immense amount of good. He died (1688) as the result of exposure while on an errand of mercy. His works were then known only to humble readers, and not until long years had passed did critics awaken to the fact that one of England's most powerful and original writers had passed away with the poor tinker of Elstow.

**Works of Bunyan.** From the pen of this uneducated preacher came nearly sixty works, great and small, the most notable of which are: *Grace Abounding* (1666), a kind of spiritual autobiography; *The Holy War* (1665), a prose allegory with a theme similar to that of Milton's epic; and *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1682), a character study which was a forerunner of the English novel. These works are seldom read, and Bunyan is known to most readers as the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). This is the famous allegory<sup>1</sup> in which, under guise of telling the story of a pilgrim in search of a city, Bunyan portrays the experiences of humanity in its journey from this world to the next. Here is an outline of the story:

In the City of Destruction lives a poor sinner called Christian. When he learns that the city is doomed, he is terrified and flees out of it, carrying a great burden on his back. He is followed by the jeers of his neighbors, who have no fear. He seeks a safe and abiding city to dwell in, but is ignorant how to find it until Evangelist shows him the road.

As he goes on his journey Mr. Worldly Wiseman meets him and urges him to return; but he hastens on, only to plunge into the Slough of Despond. His companion Pliable is here discouraged and turns back. Christian struggles on through the mud and reaches the Wicket Gate, where Interpreter shows him the way to the Celestial City. As he passes a cross beside the path, the heavy burden which he carries (his load of sins) falls off of itself. Then with many adventures he climbs the steep hill Difficulty, where his

<sup>1</sup> Allegory is figurative writing, in which some outward object or event is described in such a way that we apply the description to humanity, to our mental or spiritual experiences. The object of allegory, as a rule, is to teach moral lessons, and in this it is like a drawn-out fable and like a parable. The two greatest allegories in our literature are Spenser's *Faery Queen* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

eyes behold the Castle Beautiful. To reach this he must pass some fearful lions in the way; but he adventures on, finds that the lions are chained, is welcomed by the porter Watchful, and is entertained in the castle overnight.

Dangers thicken and difficulties multiply as he resumes his journey. His road is barred by the demon Apollyon, whom he fights to the death. The way now dips downward into the awful Valley of the Shadow. Passing through this, he enters the town of Vanity, goes to Vanity Fair, where he is abused and beaten, and where his companion Faithful is condemned to death. As he escapes from Vanity, the giant Despair seizes him and hurls him into the gloomy dungeon of Doubt. Again he escapes, struggles onward, and reaches the Delectable Mountains. There for the first time he



BUNYAN MEETINGHOUSE, SOUTHWARK

sees the Celestial City; but between him and his refuge is a river, deep and terrible, without bridge or ford. He crosses it, and the journey ends as angels come singing down the streets to welcome Christian into the city.<sup>1</sup>

Such an outline gives but a faint idea of Bunyan's great work, of its realistic figures, its living and speaking characters, its knowledge of humanity, its portrayal of the temptations and doubts that beset the ordinary man, its picturesque style, which of itself would make the book stand out above ten thousand ordinary stories. *Pilgrim's Progress* is still one of our best

<sup>1</sup> This is the story of the first part of *Pilgrim's Progress*, which was written in Bedford jail, but not published till some years later. In 1684 Bunyan published the second part of his story, describing the adventures of Christiana and her children on their journey to the Celestial City. This sequel, like most others, is of minor importance.

examples of clear, forceful, idiomatic English ; and our wonder increases when we remember that it was written by a man ignorant of literary models. But he had read his Bible daily until its style and imagery had taken possession of him ; also he had a vivid imagination, a sincere purpose to help his fellows, and his simple rule of rhetoric was to forget himself and deliver his message. In one of his poems he gives us his rule of expression, which is an excellent one for writers and speakers :

Thine only way,  
Before them all, is to say out thy say  
In thine own native language.

JOHN DRYDEN (1631-1700)

For fifty years Dryden lived in the city of Milton, in the country of John Bunyan ; but his works might indicate that he inhabited a different planet. Unlike his two great contemporaries, his first object was to win favor ; he sold his talent to the highest bidder, won the leading place among second-rate Restoration writers, and was content to reflect a generation which had neither the hearty enthusiasm of Elizabethan times nor the moral earnestness of Puritanism.

**Life.** Knowledge of Dryden's life is rather meager, and as his motives are open to question we shall state here only a few facts. He was born of a Puritan and aristocratic family, at Aldwinkle, in 1631. After an excellent education, which included seven years at Trinity College, Cambridge, he turned to literature as a means of earning a livelihood, taking a worldly view of his profession and holding his pen ready to serve the winning side. Thus, he wrote his "Heroic Stanzas," which have a hearty Puritan ring, on the death of Cromwell ; but he turned Royalist and wrote the more flattering "Astræa Redux" to welcome Charles II back to power.

In literature Dryden proved himself a man of remarkable versatility. Because plays were in demand, he produced many that catered to the His Versatility evil tastes of the Restoration stage,— plays that he afterwards condemned unsparingly. He was equally ready to write prose or verse, songs, criticisms, political satires. In 1670 he was made poet laureate under Charles II ; his affairs prospered ; he

became a literary dictator in London, holding forth nightly in Will's Coffeehouse to an admiring circle of listeners. After the Revolution of 1688 he lost his offices, and with them most of his income. In

his old age, being reduced to hackwork, he wrote obituaries, epitaphs, paraphrases of the tales of Chaucer, translations of Latin poets,—anything to earn an honest living. He died in 1700, and was buried beside Chaucer in Westminster Abbey.



JOHN DRYDEN

From a picture by Hudson in the Hall of  
Trinity College, Cambridge

to have regretted the misuse of his talent, and to have recorded his own judgment in two lines from his ode "To the Memory of Mrs. Killigrew":

O gracious God, how far have we  
Profaned thy heavenly grace of poesy!

**Works of Dryden.** The occasional poems written by Dryden may be left in the obscurity into which they fell after they had been applauded. The same may be said of his typical poem "Annus Mirabilis," which describes the wonderful events of the year 1666, a year which witnessed the taking of New Amsterdam from the Dutch and the great fire of London. Both events were celebrated in a way to contribute to the glory

Such facts are not interesting; nor do they give us a true idea of the man Dryden. To understand him we should have to read his works (no easy or pleasant task) and compare his prose prefaces, in which he is at his best, with the comedies in which he is abominable. When not engaged with the degenerate stage, or with political or literary or religious controversies, he appears sane, well-balanced, good-tempered, manly; but the impression is not a lasting one. He seems to have catered to the vicious element of his own age,

of King Charles and to Dryden's political fortune. Of all his poetical works, only the odes written in honor of St. Cecilia are now remembered. The second ode, "Alexander's Feast," is one of our best poems on the power of music.

Dryden's numerous plays show considerable dramatic power, and every one of them contains some memorable line or passage; but they are spoiled by the author's insincerity in trying to satisfy the depraved taste of the Restoration stage. He wrote one play, *All for Love*, to please himself, he said, and it is noticeable that this play is written in blank verse and shows the influence of Shakespeare, who was then out of fashion. If any of the plays are to be read, *All for Love* should be selected, though it is exceptional, not typical, and gives but a faint idea of Dryden's ordinary dramatic methods.

In the field of political satire Dryden was a master, and his work here is interesting as showing that unfortunate alliance between literature and politics which led many of the best English writers of the next century to sell their services to the Whigs or Tories. Dryden sided with the later party and, in a kind of allegory of the Bible story of Absalom's revolt against David, wrote "Absalom and Achitophel" to glorify the Tories and to castigate the Whigs. This powerful political satire was followed by others in the same vein, and by "MacFlecknoe," which satirized certain poets with whom Dryden was at loggerheads. As a rule, such works are for a day, having no enduring interest because they have no human kindness, but occasionally Dryden portrays a man of his own time so well that his picture applies to the vulgar politician of all ages, as in this characterization of Burnet:

Prompt to assail and careless of defence,  
Invulnerable in his impudence,  
He dares the world, and eager of a name  
He thrusts about and justles into fame;  
So fond of loud report that, not to miss  
Of being known (his last and utmost bliss),  
He rather would be known for what he is.

These satires of Dryden were largely influential in establishing the heroic couplet,<sup>1</sup> which dominated the fashion of English poetry for the next century. The couplet had been used by earlier poets, Chaucer for example; but in his hands it was musical and unobtrusive, a minor part of a complete work. With Dryden, and with his contemporary Waller, the making of couplets was the main thing; in their hands the couplet became "closed," that is, it often contained a complete thought, a criticism, a nugget of common sense, a poem in itself, as in this aphorism from "MacFlecknoe":

All human things are subject to decay,  
And when Fate summons, monarchs must obey.

In his prose works Dryden proved himself the ablest critic of his time, and the inventor of a neat, serviceable style which, **Prose Works** with flattery to ourselves, we are wont to call modern. Among his numerous critical works we note especially "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy," "Of Heroic Plays," "Discourse on Satire," and the Preface to his *Fables*. These have not the vigor or picturesqueness of Bunyan's prose, but they are written clearly, in short sentences, with the chief aim of being understood. If we compare them with the sonorous periods of Milton, or with the pretty involutions of Sidney, we shall see why Dryden is called "the father of modern prose." His sensible style appears in this criticism of Chaucer:

"He must have been a man of a most wonderful comprehensive nature, because, as it has been truly observed of him, he has taken into the compass of his *Canterbury Tales* the various manners and humours (as we now call them) of the whole English nation in his age. Not a single character has escaped him. . . . We have our fathers and great-grand-dames all before us as they were in Chaucer's days: their general characters are still remaining in mankind, and even in England, though they are called by other names than those of monks and friars and canons and lady abbesses and nuns; for mankind is ever the same, and nothing lost out of nature though everything is altered."

<sup>1</sup> The heroic couplet consists of two iambic pentameter lines that rhyme. By "pentameter" is meant that the line has five feet or measures; by "iambic," that each foot contains two syllables, the first short or unaccented, the second long or accented.

## SECONDARY WRITERS

**Puritan and Cavalier Verse.** The numerous minor poets of this period are often arranged in groups, but any true classification is impossible since there was no unity among them. Each was a law unto himself, and the result was to emphasize personal oddity or eccentricity. It would seem that in writing of love, the common theme of poets, Puritan and Cavalier must alike speak the common language of the heart; but that is precisely what they did not do. With them love was no longer a passion, or even a fashion, but any fantastic conceit that might decorate a rime. Thus, Suckling habitually made love a joke:

Why so pale and wan, fond lover,  
 Prithee why so pale?  
 Will, when looking well wont move her,  
 Looking ill prevail?  
 Prithee why so pale?

Crashaw turned from his religious poems to sing of love in a way to appeal to the Transcendentalists, of a later age:

Whoe'er she be,  
 That not impossible she  
 That shall command my heart and me.

And Donne must search out some odd notion from natural (or unnatural) history, making love a spider that turns the wine of life into poison; or from mechanics, comparing lovers to a pair of dividers:

If they be two, they are two so  
 As stiff twin compasses are two:  
 Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show  
 To move, but doth if the other do.

Several of these poets, commonly grouped in a class which includes Donne, Herbert, Cowley, Crashaw, and others famous in their day, received the name of metaphysical poets, not because of their profound thought, but because of their eccentric

style and queer figures of speech. Of all this group George Herbert (1593-1633) is the sanest and the sweetest. His chief work, *The Temple*, is a collection of poems celebrating the



GEORGE HERBERT

From a rare print by White, prefixed to his poems

lurks even in his calmest verses. Note in these opening and closing stanzas of "Virtue" the restraint of the one, the hidden glow of the other :

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,  
The bridal of the earth and sky !  
The dew shall weep thy fall to-night ;  
For thou must die.

Only a sweet and virtuous soul,  
Like seasoned timber, never gives ;  
But, though the whole world turn to coal,  
Then chiefly lives.

In contrast with the disciplined Puritan spirit of Herbert is the gayety of another group, called the Cavalier poets, among

the beauty of holiness, the sacraments, the Church, the experiences of the Christian life. Some of these poems are ingenious conceits, and deserve the derisive name of "metaphysical" which Dr. Johnson flung at them ; but others, such as "Virtue," "The Pulley," "Love" and "The Collar," are the expression of a beautiful and saintly soul, speaking of the deep things of God ; and speaking so quietly withal that one is apt to miss the intensity that

whom are Carew, Suckling and Lovelace. They reflect clearly the spirit of the Royalists who followed King Charles with a Cavalier devotion worthy of a better master. Robert Herrick Poets (1591-1674) is the best known of this group, and his only book, *Hesperides and Noble Numbers* (1648), reflects the two elements found in most of the minor poetry of the age; namely, Cavalier gayety and Puritan seriousness. In the first part of the book are some graceful verses celebrating the light loves of the Cavaliers and the fleeting joys of country life :

I sing of brooks, of blossoms, birds and bowers,  
Of April, May, of June and July flowers;  
I sing of Maypoles, hock-carts, wassails, wakes,  
Of bridegrooms, brides, and of their bridal cakes.

In *Noble Numbers* such poems as "Thanksgiving," "A True Lent," "Litany," and the child's "Ode on the Birth of Our Saviour" reflect the better side of the Cavalier, who can be serious without pulling a long face, who goes to his devotions cheerfully, and who retains even in his religion what Andrew Lang calls a spirit of unregenerate happiness.

Samuel Butler (1612-1680) may also be classed with the Cavalier poets, though in truth he stands alone in this age, a Butler's Hudibras master of doggerel rime and of ferocious satire. His chief work, *Hudibras*, a grotesque caricature of Puritanism, appeared in 1663, when the restored king and his favorites were shamelessly plundering the government. The poem (probably suggested by *Don Quixote*) relates a rambling story of the adventures of Sir Hudibras, a sniveling Puritan knight, and his squire Ralpho. Its doggerel style may be inferred from the following :

Besides, 't is known he could speak Greek  
As naturally as pigs squeak;  
That Latin was no more difficle  
Than to a blackbird 't is to whistle:  
Being rich in both, he never scanted  
His bounty unto such as wanted.

Such was the stuff that the Royalists quoted to each other as wit; and the wit was so dear to king and courtiers that they carried copies of *Hudibras* around in their pockets. The poem was enormously popular in its day, and some of its best lines are still quoted; but the selections we now meet give but a faint idea of the general scurrility of a work which amused England in the days when the Puritan's fanaticism was keenly remembered, his struggle for liberty quite forgotten.



SIR THOMAS BROWNE

**Prose Writers.** Of the hundreds of prose works that appeared in Puritan times very few are now known even by name. Their controversial fires are sunk to ashes; even the causes that produced or fanned them are forgotten. Meanwhile we cherish a few books that speak not of strife but of peace and charity.

Thomas Browne (1605–1682) was a physician, vastly learned in a day when he and other doctors

gravely prescribed herbs or bloodsuckers for witchcraft; but he was less interested in his profession than in what was then called modern science. His most famous work is *Religio Medici* (Religion of a Physician, 1642), a beautiful book, cherished by those who know it as one of the greatest prose works in the language. His *Urn Burial* is even more remarkable for its subtle thought and condensed expression; but its charm, like that of the Silent Places, is for the few who can discover and appreciate it.

Isaac Walton (1593-1683), or Isaak, as he always wrote it, was a modest linen merchant who, in the midst of troublous times, kept his serenity of spirit by attending strictly to his own affairs, by reading good books, and by going fishing. His taste for literature is reflected with rare simplicity in his *Lives of Donne, Wotton, Hooker, George Herbert and Bishop Sanderson*, a series of biographies which are among the earliest and sweetest in our language. Their charm lies partly in their refined style, but more largely in their revelation of character; for Walton chose men of gentle spirit for his subjects, men who were like himself in cherishing the still depths of life rather than its noisy shallows, and wrote of them with the understanding of perfect sympathy. Wordsworth expressed his appreciation of the work in a noble sonnet beginning:

There are no colours in the fairest sky  
 So fair as these. The feather whence the pen  
 Was shaped that traced the lives of these good men  
 Dropped from an angel's wing.

Walton's love of fishing, and of all the lore of trout brooks and spring meadows that fishing implies, found expression in *The Compleat Angler, or Contemplative Man's Recreation* (1653). This is a series of conversations in which an angler convinces his friends that fishing is not merely the sport of catching fish, but an art that men are born to, like the art



ISAAC WALTON

of poetry. Even such a hard-hearted matter as impaling a minnow for bait becomes poetical, for this is the fashion of it: "Put your hook in at his mouth, and out at his gills, and do it as if you loved him." It is enough to say of this old work, the classic of its kind, that it deserves all the honor which the tribe of anglers have given it, and that you could hardly find a better book to fall asleep over after a day's fishing.

No such gentle, human, lovable books were

Evelyn and Pepys produced in Restoration times. The most famous prose works of the period

are the diaries of John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys. The former was a gentleman, and his *Diary* is an interesting chronicle of matters large and small from 1641 to 1697. Pepys, though he became Secretary of the Admiralty and President of the Royal Society, was a gossip, a chatterbox, with an eye that loved to peek into closets and a tongue that ran to slander. His *Diary*, covering the period from 1660 to 1669, is a keen but malicious exposition of private and public life during the Restoration.



OLD FISHING HOUSE, ON RIVER DOVE, USED  
BY WALTON

**Summary.** The literary period just studied covers the last three-quarters of the seventeenth century. Its limits are very indefinite, merging into Elizabethan romance on the one side, and into eighteenth-century formalism on the other. Historically, the period was one of bitter conflict between two main political and religious parties, the Royalists, or Cavaliers,

and the Puritans. The literature of the age is extremely diverse in character, and is sadly lacking in the unity, the joyousness, the splendid enthusiasm of Elizabethan prose and poetry.

The greatest writer of the period was John Milton. He is famous in literature for his early or Horton poems, which are Elizabethan in spirit; for his controversial prose works, which reflect the strife of the age; for his epic of *Paradise Lost*, and for his tragedy of *Samson*.

Another notable Puritan, or rather Independent, writer was John Bunyan, whose works reflect the religious ferment of the seventeenth century. His chief works are *Grace Abounding*, a kind of spiritual biography, and *The Pilgrim's Progress*, an allegory of the Christian life which has been more widely read than any other English book.

The chief writer of the Restoration period was John Dryden, a professional author, who often catered to the coarser tastes of the age. There is no single work by which he is gratefully remembered. He is noted for his political satires, for his vigorous use of the heroic couplet, for his modern prose style, and for his literary criticisms.

Among the numerous minor poets of the period Robert Herrick and George Herbert are especially noteworthy. A few miscellaneous prose works are the *Religio Medici* of Thomas Browne, *The Compleat Angler* of Isaac Walton, and the diaries of Pepys and Evelyn.

**Selections for Reading.** Minor poems of Milton, and parts of *Paradise Lost*, in Standard English Classics, Riverside Literature, and other school series (see Texts, in General Bibliography). Selections from Cavalier and Puritan poets in Maynard's English Classics, Golden Treasury Series, Manly's English Poetry, Century Readings, Ward's English Poets. Prose selections in Manly's English Prose, Craik's English Prose Selections, Garnett's English Prose from Elizabeth to Victoria. *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Grace Abounding* in Standard English Classics, Pocket Classics, Student's Classics. *Religio Medici* and *Complete Angler* in Temple Classics and Everyman's Library. Selections from Dryden in Manly's English Prose and Manly's English Poetry. Dryden's version of Palamon and Arcite (the Knight's Tale of Chaucer) in Standard English Classics, Riverside Literature, Lake Classics.

**Bibliography.** For texts and manuals dealing with the whole field of English history and literature see the General Bibliography. The following works deal chiefly with the Puritan and Restoration periods.

**History.** Wakeling, King and Parliament (Oxford Manuals of English History); Gardiner, *The First Two Stuarts and the Puritan Revolution* (Great Epochs Series); Tulloch, *English Puritanism*; Harrison, *Oliver Cromwell*; Hale, *The Fall of the Stuarts*; Airy, *The English Restoration and Louis XIV.*

**Literature.** Masterman, *The Age of Milton*; Dowden, *Puritan and Anglican*; Wendell, *Temper of the Seventeenth Century in Literature*; Gosse, *Seventeenth-Century Studies*; Schilling, *Seventeenth-Century Lyrics* (Athenæum Press Series); Isaac Walton, *Lives of Donne, Wotton, Hooker, Herbert and Sanderson*.

**Milton.** Life, by Garnett (Great Writers Series); by Pattison (English Men of Letters). Corson, *Introduction to Milton*; Raleigh, *Milton*; Stopford Brooke, *Milton*. Essays, by Macaulay; by Lowell, in *Among My Books*; by M. Arnold, in *Essays in Criticism*.

**Bunyan.** Life, by Venables (Great Writers); by Froude (E. M. of L.). Brown, *John Bunyan*; Woodberry's essay, in *Makers of Literature*.

**Dryden.** Life by Saintsbury (E. M. of L.). Gosse, *From Shakespeare to Pope*.

**Thomas Browne.** Life, by Gosse (E. M. of L.). Essays, by L. Stephen, in *Hours in a Library*; by Pater, in *Appreciations*.

**Fiction and Poetry.** Shorthouse, *John Inglesant*; Scott, *Old Mortality*, *Peveril of the Peak*, *Woodstock*; Blackmore, *Lorna Doone*. Milton, *Sonnet on Cromwell*; Scott, *Rokeby*; Bates and Coman, *English History Told by English Poets*.

## CHAPTER VI

### EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE

In words, as fashions, the same rule will hold:  
Alike fantastic if too new or old.  
Be not the first by whom the new are tried,  
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.

Pope, "An Essay on Criticism"

**History of the Period.** The most striking political feature of the times was the rise of constitutional and party government. The Revolution of 1688, which banished the Stuarts, had settled the king question by making Parliament supreme in England, but not all Englishmen were content with the settlement. No sooner were the people in control of the government than they divided into hostile parties: the liberal Whigs, who were determined to safeguard popular liberty, and the conservative Tories, with tender memories of kingcraft, who would leave as much authority as possible in the royal hands. On the extreme of Toryism was a third party of zealots, called the Jacobites, who aimed to bring the Stuarts back to the throne, and who for fifty years filled Britain with plots and rebellion. The literature of the age was at times dominated by the interests of these contending factions.

The two main parties were so well balanced that power shifted easily from one to the other. To overturn a Tory or a Whig cabinet only a few votes were necessary, and to influence such votes London was flooded with pamphlets. Even before the great newspapers appeared, the press had become a mighty power in England, and any writer with a talent for argument or satire was almost certain to be hired by party leaders. Addison, Steele, Defoe, Swift,—most of the great writers of the age were, on occasion, the willing servants of the Whigs or Tories. So the new politician replaced the old nobleman as a patron of letters.

Another feature of the age was the rapid development of social life. In earlier ages the typical Englishman had lived much by himself; his home was his castle, and in it he developed his intense individualism;

but in the first half of the eighteenth century some three thousand public coffeehouses and a large number of private clubs appeared in London alone; and the sociability of which these clubs were an expression was typical of all English cities. Meanwhile country life was in sore need of refinement.

**Social Life** The influence of this social life on literature was inevitable. Nearly all writers frequented the coffeehouses, and matters discussed there became subjects of literature; hence the enormous amount of eighteenth-century writing devoted to transient affairs, to politics, fashions, gossip. Moreover, as the club leaders set the fashion in manners or dress, in the correct way of taking snuff or of wearing wigs and ruffles, so the literary leaders emphasized formality or correctness of style, and to write prose like Addison, or verse like Pope, became the ambition of aspiring young authors.

There are certain books of the period (seldom studied amongst its masterpieces) which are the best possible expression of its thought and manners. The Letters of Lord Chesterfield, for example, especially those written to his son, are more significant, and more readable, than anything produced by Johnson. Even better are the Memoirs of Horace Walpole, and his gossiping Letters, of which Thackeray wrote:

"Fiddles sing all through them; wax lights, fine dresses, fine jokes, fine plate, fine equipages glitter and sparkle; never was such a brilliant, smirking *Vanity Fair* as that through which he leads us."

**Spread of Empire** Two other significant features of the age were the large part played by England in Continental wars, and the rapid expansion of the British empire. These Continental wars, which have ever since influenced British policy, seem to have originated (aside from the important matter of self-interest) in a double motive: to prevent any one nation from gaining overwhelming superiority by force of arms, and to save the smaller "buffer" states from being absorbed by their powerful neighbors. Thus the War of the Spanish Succession (1711) prevented the union of the French and Spanish monarchies, and preserved the smaller states of Holland and Germany. As Addison then wrote, at least half truthfully:

'T is Britain's care to watch o'er Europe's fate,  
And hold in balance each contending state:  
To threaten bold, presumptuous kings with war,  
And answer her afflicted neighbors' prayer.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From Addison's Address to Liberty, in his poetical "Letter to Lord Halifax."

The expansion of the empire, on the whole the most marvelous feature of English history, received a tremendous impetus in this age when India, Australia and the greater part of North America were added to the British dominions, and when Captain Cook opened the way for a belt of colonies around the whole world.

The influence of the last-named movement hardly appears in the books which we ordinarily read as typical of the age. There are other books, however, which one may well read for his own unhampered enjoyment: such expansive books as Hawkesworth's *Voyages* (1773), corresponding to Hakluyt's famous record of Elizabethan exploration, and especially the *Voyages of Captain Cook*,<sup>1</sup> which take us from the drawing-room chatter of politics or fashion or criticism into a world of adventure and great achievement. In such works, which make no profession of literary style, we feel the lure of the sea and of lands beyond the horizon, which is as the mighty background of English literature from Anglo-Saxon times to the present day.

It is difficult to summarize the literature of this age, or to group such antagonistic writers as Swift and Addison, Pope and Burns, Defoe and Johnson, Goldsmith and Fielding, with any fine discrimination. It is simply for convenience, therefore, that we study eighteenth-century writings in three main divisions: the reign of so-called classicism, the revival of romantic poetry, and the beginnings of the modern novel. As a whole, it is an age of prose rather than of poetry, and in this respect it differs from all preceding ages of English literature.

#### EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY CLASSICISM

The above title is an unfortunate one, but since it is widely used we must try to understand it as best we can. Yet when one begins to define "classicism" one is reminded of that old bore Polonius, who tells how Hamlet is affected:

Your noble son is mad:  
Mad, call I it; for to define true madness,  
What is 't but to be nothing else but mad?

<sup>1</sup> The first of Cook's fateful voyages appears in Hawkesworth's collection. The second was recorded by Cook himself (1777), and the third by Cook and Captain King (1784). See Synge, *Captain Cook's Voyages Around the World* (London, 1897).

In our literature the word "classic" was probably first used in connection with the writers of Greece and Rome, and any English work which showed the influence of such writers was said to have a classic style. If we seek to the root of the word, we shall find that it refers to the *classici*, that is, to the highest of the classes into which the census divided the Roman people; hence the proper use of "classic" to designate the writings that have won first rank in any nation. As Goethe said, "Everything that is good in literature is classical."

Gradually, however, the word "classic" came to have a different meaning, a meaning now expressed by the word "formal." In the Elizabethan age, as we have seen, critics insisted that English plays should conform to the rules or "unities" of the Greek drama, and plays written according to such rules were called classic. Again, in the eighteenth century, English poets took to studying ancient authors, especially Horace, to find out how poetry should be written. Having discovered, as they thought, the rules of composition, they insisted on following such rules rather than individual genius or inspiration. It is largely because of this adherence to rules, this slavery to a fashion of the time, that so much of eighteenth-century verse seems cold and artificial, a thing made to order rather than the natural expression of human feeling. The writers themselves were well satisfied with their formality, however, and called their own the Classic or Augustan age of English letters.<sup>1</sup>

### ALEXANDER POPE (1688-1744)

It was in 1819 that a controversy arose over the question, Was Pope a poet? To have asked that in 1719 would have indicated that the questioner was ignorant; to have asked it

<sup>1</sup> Though the eighteenth century was dominated by this formal spirit, it had, like every other age, its classic and romantic movements. The work of Gray, Burns and other romantic poets will be considered later.

a half century later might have raised a doubt as to his sanity, for by that time Pope was acclaimed as a master by the great majority of poets in England and America. We judge now, looking at him in perspective and comparing him with Chaucer or Burns, that he was not a great poet but simply the kind of poet that the age demanded. He belongs to eighteenth-century London exclusively, and herein he differs from the master poets who are at home in all places and expressive of all time.

**Life.** Pope is an interesting but not a lovable figure. Against the petty details of his life we should place, as a background, these amazing achievements: that this poor cripple, weak of body and spiteful of mind, was the supreme literary figure of his age; that he demonstrated how an English poet could live by his pen, instead of depending on patrons; that he won greater fame and fortune than Shakespeare or Milton received from their contemporaries; that he dominated the fashion of English poetry during his lifetime, and for many years after his death.

Such are the important facts of Pope's career. For the rest: he was born in London, in the year of the Revolution (1688). Soon after that date his father, having gained a modest fortune **The Writer** in the linen business, retired to Binfield, on the fringe of Windsor Forest. There Pope passed his boyhood, studying a little under private tutors, forming a pleasurable acquaintance with Latin and Greek poets. From fourteen to twenty, he tells us, he read for amusement; but from twenty to twenty-seven he read for "improvement and instruction." The most significant traits of these early years were his determination to be a poet and his talent for imitating any



ALEXANDER POPE

writer who pleased him. Dryden was his first master, from whom he inherited the couplet; then he imitated the French critic Boileau and the Roman poet Horace. By the time he was twenty-four the publication of his *Essay on Criticism* and *The Rape of the Lock* had made him the foremost poet of England. By his translation of Homer he made a fortune, with which he bought a villa at Twickenham. There he lived in the pale sunshine of literary success, and there he quarreled with every writer who failed to appreciate his verses, his jealousy



TWICKENHAM PARISH CHURCH, WHERE POPE WAS BURIED

Pope lived at Twickenham for nearly thirty years

overflowing at last in *The Dunciad* (Iliad of Dunces), a witty but venomous lampoon, in which he took revenge on all who had angered him.

Next to his desire for glory and revenge, Pope loved to be considered a man of high character, a teacher of moral philosophy. His **The Man** ethical teaching appears in his *Moral Epistles*; his desire for a good reputation is written large in his *Letters*, which he secretly printed, and then alleged that they had been made public against his wish. These *Letters* might impress us as the utterances of a man of noble ideals, magnanimous with his friends, patient with his enemies, until we reflect that they were published by the author for the purpose of giving precisely that impression.

Another side of Pope's nature is revealed in this: that to some of his friends, to Swift and Bolingbroke for example, he showed gratitude, and that to his parents he was ever a dutiful son. He came perhaps as near as he could to a real rather than an artificial sentiment when he wrote of his old mother:

Me let the tender office long engage,  
To rock the cradle of reposing age.

**Works of Pope.** Pope's first important work, *An Essay on Criticism* (1711), is an echo of the rules which Horace had formulated in his *Ars Poetica*, more than seventeen centuries before Pope was born. The French critic Boileau made an alleged improvement of Horace in his *L'Art Poétique*, and Pope imitated both writers with his rimed *Essay*, in which he attempted to sum up the rules by which poetry should be judged. And he did it, while still under the age of twenty-five, so brilliantly that his characterization of the critic is unmatched in our literature. A few selections will serve to show the character of the work:

First follow nature, and your judgment frame  
By her just standard, which is still the same:  
Unerring nature, still divinely bright,  
One clear, unchanged and universal light,  
Life, force and beauty must to all impart,  
At once the source and end and test of Art.

Poets, like painters, thus unskilled to trace  
The naked nature and the living grace,  
With gold and jewels cover every part,  
And hide with ornaments their want of art.  
True wit is nature to advantage dressed,  
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.

Expression is the dress of thought, and still  
Appears more decent, as more suitable.

Pope's next important poem, *The Rape of the Lock* (1712), is his most original and readable work. The occasion of the poem was that a fop stole a lock of hair from a young lady, and the theft plunged two families into a quarrel which was

taken up by the fashionable set of London. Pope made a mock-heroic poem on the subject, in which he satirized the fads and fashions of Queen Anne's age. Ordinarily Pope's fancy is of small range, and proceeds jerkily, like the flight of a woodpecker, from couplet to couplet; but here he attempts to soar like the eagle. He introduces dainty aerial creatures, gnomes, sprites, sylphs, to combat for the belles and fops in their trivial concerns; and herein we see a clever burlesque of the old epic poems, in which gods or goddesses entered into the serious affairs of mortals. The craftsmanship of the poem is above praise; it is not only a neatly pointed satire on eighteenth-century fashions but is one of the most graceful works in English verse.

An excellent supplement to *The Rape of the Lock*, which pictures the superficial elegance of the age, is *An Essay on Man*, which reflects its philosophy. That philosophy, under the general name of Deism, had fancied to abolish the Church and all revealed religion, and had set up a new-old standard of natural faith and morals. Of this philosophy Pope had small knowledge; but he was well acquainted with the discredited Bolingbroke, his "guide, philosopher and friend," who was a fluent exponent of the new doctrine, and from Bolingbroke came the general scheme of the *Essay on Man*.

The poem appears in the form of four epistles, dealing with man's place in the universe, with his moral nature, with social and political ethics, and with the problem of happiness. These were discussed from a common-sense viewpoint, and with feet always on solid earth. As Pope declares:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;  
The proper study of mankind is man. . . .  
Created half to rise, and half to fall;  
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;  
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled;  
The glory, jest and riddle of the world.

Throughout the poem these two doctrines of Deism are kept in sight: that there is a God, a Mystery, who dwells apart from the world; and that man ought to be contented, even happy, in his ignorance of matters beyond his horizon:

All nature is but art, unknown to thee;  
All chance, direction which thou canst not see;  
All discord, harmony not understood;  
All partial evil, universal good;  
And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,  
One truth is clear: whatever is, is right.

The result is rubbish, so far as philosophy is concerned, but in the heap of incongruous statements which Pope brings together are a large number of quotable lines, such as:

Honor and shame from no condition rise;  
Act well your part, there all the honor lies.

It is because of such lines, the care with which the whole poem is polished, and the occasional appearance of real beauty (such as the passage beginning, "Lo, the poor Indian") that the *Essay on Man* occupies such a high place in eighteenth-century literature.

It is hardly necessary to examine other works of Pope, since the poems already named give us the full measure of his <sup>The Quality of Pope</sup> strength and weakness. His talent is to formulate rules of poetry, to satirize fashionable society, to make brilliant epigrams in faultless couplets. His failure to move or even to interest us greatly is due to his second-hand philosophy, his inability to feel or express emotion, his artificial life apart from nature and humanity. When we read Chaucer or Shakespeare, we have the impression that they would have been at home in any age or place, since they deal with human interests that are the same yesterday, to-day and forever; but we can hardly imagine Pope feeling at ease anywhere save in his own set and in his own generation. He is the poet of one period, which set great store by formality, and in that period alone he is supreme.

## JONATHAN SWIFT (1667-1745)

In the history of literature Swift occupies a large place as the most powerful of English satirists; that is, writers who search out the faults of society in order to hold them up to ridicule. To most readers, however, he is known as the author of *Gulliver's Travels*, a book which young people still read with pleasure, as they read *Robinson Crusoe* or any other story of

adventure. In the fate of that book, which was intended to scourge humanity but which has become a source of innocent entertainment, is a commentary on the colossal failure of Swift's ambition.



JONATHAN SWIFT

**Life.** Little need be recorded of Swift's life beyond the few facts which help us to understand his satires. He was born in Dublin, of English parents, and was so "battered by fortune" that he was compelled to spend

the greater part of his life in Ireland, a country which he detested. He was very poor, very proud; and even in youth he railed at a mocking fate which compelled him to accept aid from others. For his education he was dependent on a relative, who helped him grudgingly. After leaving Trinity College, Dublin, the only employment he could find was with another relative, Sir William Temple, a retired statesman, who hired Swift as a secretary and treated him as a servant. Galled by his position and by his feeling of superiority (for he was a man of physical and mental power, who longed to be a master of great affairs) he took orders in the Anglican Church; but the only appointment he could obtain was in a village buried, as he

said, in a forsaken district of Ireland. There his bitterness overflowed in *A Tale of a Tub* and a few pamphlets of such satiric power that certain political leaders recognized Swift's value and summoned him to their assistance.

To understand his success in London one must remember the times. Politics were rampant; the city was the battleground of Whigs and Tories, whose best weapon was the printed pamphlet that justified one party by heaping abuse or ridicule on the other. Swift was a master of satire, and he was soon the most feared author in England. He seems to have had no fixed principles,



TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN

for he was ready to join the Tories when that party came into power and to turn his literary cannon on the Whigs, whom he had recently supported. In truth, he despised both parties; his chief object was to win for himself the masterful position in Church or state for which, he believed, his talents had fitted him.

For several years Swift was the literary champion of the victorious Tories; then, when his keen eye detected signs of tottering in the party, he asked for his reward. He obtained, not the great bishopric which he expected, but an appointment as Dean of St. Patrick's

Cathedral in Dublin. Small and bitter fruit this seemed to Swift, after his years of service, but even so, it was given grudgingly.<sup>1</sup>

When the Tories went out of power Swift's political occupation was gone. The last thirty years of his life were spent largely in Dublin. There in a living grave, as he regarded it, the scorn which he had hitherto felt for individuals or institutions widened until it included humanity. Such is the meaning of his *Gulliver's Travels*. His only pleasure during these years was to expose the gullibility of men, and a hundred good stories are current of his practical jokes,—such as his getting rid of a crowd which had gathered to watch an eclipse by sending a solemn messenger to announce that, by the Dean's orders, the eclipse was postponed till the next day. A brain disease fastened upon him gradually, and his last years were passed in a state of alternate stupor or madness from which death was a blessed deliverance.

**Works of Swift.** The poems of Swift, though they show undoubted power (every smallest thing he wrote bears that stamp), may be passed over with the comment of his relative Dryden, who wrote: "Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet." The criticism was right, but thereafter Swift jeered at Dryden's poetry. We may pass over also the *Battle of the Books*, the *Drapier's Letters* and a score more of satires and lampoons. Of all these minor works the *Bickerstaff Papers*, which record Swift's practical joke on the astrologers, are most amusing.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Swift's pride and arrogance with his official superiors worked against him. Also he had published *A Tale of a Tub*, a coarse satire against the churches, which scandalized the queen and her ministers, who could have given him preferment. Thackeray says, "I think the Bishops who advised Queen Anne not to appoint the author of the *Tale of a Tub* to a Bishopric gave perfectly good advice."

<sup>2</sup> Almanacs were at that time published by pretender astrologers, who read fortunes or made predictions from the stars. Against the most famous of these quacks, Partridge by name, Swift leveled his "Predictions for the year 1708, by Isaac Bickerstaff." Among the predictions of coming events was this trifle: that Partridge was doomed to die on March 29 following, about eleven o'clock at night, of a raging fever. On March 30 appeared, in the newspapers, a letter giving the details of Partridge's death, and then a pamphlet called "An Elegy of Mr. Partridge." Presently Partridge, who could not see the joke, made London laugh by his frantic attempts to prove that he was alive. Then appeared an elaborate "Vindication of Isaac Bickerstaff," which proved by the infallible stars that Partridge was dead, and that the astrologer now in his place was an impostor. This joke was copied twenty-five years later by Franklin in his *Poor Richard's Almanac*.

Swift's fame now rests largely upon his *Gulliver's Travels*, which appeared in 1726 under the title, "Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, by Lemuel Gulliver, first a Surgeon and then a Captain of Several Ships." In the first voyage we are taken to Lilliput, a country inhabited by human beings about six inches tall, with minds in proportion. The capers of these midgets are a satire on human society, as seen through Swift's scornful eyes. In the second voyage we go to Brobdingnag, where the people are of gigantic stature, and by contrast we are reminded of the petty "human insects" whom Gulliver represents. The third voyage, to the Island of Laputa, is a burlesque of the scientists and philosophers of Swift's day. The fourth leads to the land of the Houyhnhnms, where intelligent horses are the ruling creatures, and humanity is represented by the Yahoos, a horribly degraded race, having the forms of men and the bestial habits of monkeys.

Such is the ferocious satire on the elegant society of Queen Anne's day. Fortunately for our peace of mind we can read the book for its grim humor and adventurous action, as we read any other good story. Indeed, it surprises most readers of *Gulliver* to be told that the work was intended to wreck our faith in humanity.

In all his satires Swift's power lies in his prose style — a convincing style, clear, graphic, straightforward — and in his **Quality of Swift** marvelous ability to make every scene, however distant or grotesque, as natural as life itself. As Emerson said, he describes his characters as if for the police. His weakness is twofold: he has a fondness for coarse or malodorous references, and he is so beclouded in his own soul that he cannot see his fellows in a true light. In one of his early works he announced the purpose of all his writing:

My hate, whose lash just Heaven has long decreed,  
Shall on a day make Sin and Folly bleed.

That was written at twenty-six, before he took orders in the Church. As a theological student it was certainly impressed upon the young man that Heaven keeps its own prerogatives, and that sin and folly have never been effectually reformed by lashing. But Swift had a scorn of all judgment except his own. As the eyes of fishes are so arranged that they see only their prey and their enemies, so Swift had eyes only for the vices of men and for the lash that scourges them. When he wrote, therefore, he was not an observer, or even a judge ; he was a criminal lawyer prosecuting humanity on the charge of being a sham. A tendency to insanity may possibly account both for his spleen against others and for the self-tortures which made him, as Archbishop King said, "the most unhappy man on earth."

There is one oasis in the bitter desert of Swift's writings, namely, his *Journal to Stella*. While in the employ of Temple <sup>Journal to Stella</sup> he was the daily companion of a young girl, Esther Johnson, who was an inmate of the same household. Her love for Swift was pure and constant ; wherever he went she followed and lived near him, bringing a ray of sunshine into his life, in a spirit which reminds us of the sublime expression of another woman : "For whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge ; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." She was probably married to Swift, but his pride kept him from openly acknowledging the union. While he was at London he wrote a private journal for Esther (Stella) in which he recorded his impressions of the men and women he met, and of the political battles in which he took part. That journal, filled with strange abbreviations to which only he and Stella had the key, can hardly be called literature, but it is of profound interest. It gives us glimpses of a woman who chose to live in the shadow ; it shows the better side of Swift's nature, in contrast with his arrogance toward men and his brutal treatment of women ; and finally, it often takes us behind the scenes of a stage on which was played a mixed comedy of politics and society.

## JOSEPH ADDISON (1672-1719)

In Addison we have a pleasant reflection of the new social life of England. Select almost any feature of that life, and you shall find some account of it in the papers of Addison: its party politics in his *Whig Examiner*; its "grand tour," as part of a gentleman's education, in his *Remarks on Italy*; its adventure on foreign soil in such poems as "The Campaign"; its new drama of decency in his *Cato*; its classic delusions in his *Account of the Greatest English Poets*; its frills, fashions and similar matters in his *Spectator* essays. He tried almost every type of literature, from hymns to librettos, and in each he succeeded well enough to be loudly applauded. In his own day he was accounted a master poet, but now he is remembered as a writer of prose essays.

**Life.** Addison's career offers an interesting contrast to that of Swift, who lived in the same age. He was the son of an English clergyman, settled in the deanery of Lichfield, and his early training left upon him the stamp of good taste and good breeding. In school he was always the model boy; in Oxford he wrote Latin verses on safe subjects, in the approved fashion; in politics he was content to "oil the machine" as he found it; in society he was shy and silent (though naturally a brilliant talker) because he feared to make some slip which might mar his prospects or the dignity of his position.

A very discreet man was Addison, and the only failure he made of discretion was when he married the Dowager Countess of Warwick,



JOSEPH ADDISON

went to live in her elegant Holland House, and lived unhappily ever afterwards. The last is a mere formal expression. Addison had not depth enough to be really unhappy. From the cold comfort of the Dowager's palace he would slip off to his club or to Will's Coffee-house. There, with a pipe and a bottle, he would loosen his eloquent tongue and proceed to make discreetly merry with a few old friends.



MAGDALEN COLLEGE, OXFORD

His characteristic quality appears in the literary work which followed his Latin verses. He began with a flattering "Address to Dryden," which pleased the old poet and brought Addison to the attention of literary celebrities. His next effort was "The Peace of Ryswick," which flattered King William's statesmen and brought the author a chance to serve the Whig party. Also it brought a pension, with a suggestion that Addison should travel abroad and learn French and diplomacy; which he did, to his great content, for the space of three years.

The death of the king brought Addison back to England. His pension stopped, and for a time he lived poorly "in a garret," as one may read in Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*. Then came news of an English victory on the Continent (Marlborough's victory at Blenheim), and the Whigs wanted to make political capital out of the event. Addison was hunted up and engaged to write a poem. He responded with

"The Campaign," which made him famous. Patriots and politicians ascribed to the poem undying glory, and their judgment was accepted by fashionable folk of London. To read it now is to meet a formal, uninspired production, containing a few stock quotations and, incidentally, a sad commentary on the union of Whiggery and poetry.

From that moment Addison's success was assured. He was given various offices of increasing importance; he entered Parliament; **His Path of Roses** he wrote a classic tragedy, *Cato*, which took London by storm (his friend Steele had carefully "packed the house" for the first performance); his essays in *The Spectator* were discussed in every fashionable club or drawing-room; he married a rich countess; he was appointed Secretary of State. The path of politics, which others find so narrow and slippery, was for Addison a broad road through pleasant gardens. Meanwhile Swift, who could not follow the Addisonian way of kindness and courtesy, was eating bitter bread and railing at humanity.

After a brief experience as Secretary of State, finding that he could not make the speeches expected of him, Addison retired on a pension. His unwavering allegiance to good form in all matters appears even in his last remark, "See how a Christian can die." That was in 1719. He had sought the easiest, pleasantest way through life, and had found it. Thackeray, who was in sympathy with such a career, summed it up in a glowing panegyric:

"A life prosperous and beautiful, a calm death; an immense fame and affection afterwards for his happy and spotless name."

**Works of Addison.** Addison's great reputation was won chiefly by his poetry; but with the exception of a few hymns, simple and devout, his poetical works no longer appeal to us. He was not a poet but a verse-maker. His classic tragedy *Cato*, for example (which met with such amazing success in London that it was taken over to the Continent, where it was acclaimed "a masterpiece of regularity and elegance"), has some good passages, but one who reads the context is apt to find the elegant lines running together somewhat drowsily. Nor need that reflect on our taste or intelligence. Even the cultured Greeks, as if in anticipation of classic poems, built two adjoining temples, one dedicated to the Muses and the other to Sleep.

The *Essays* of Addison give us the full measure of his literary talent. In his verse, as in his political works, he seems to be speaking to strangers ; he is on guard over his **The Essays** dignity as a poet, as Secretary of State, as husband of a countess ; but in his *Essays* we meet the man at his ease, fluent, witty, light-hearted but not frivolous, — just as he talked to his friends in Will's Coffeehouse. The conversational quality of these *Essays* has influenced all subsequent works of the same type, — a type hard to define, but which leaves the impression of pleasant talk about a subject, as distinct from any learned discussion.

The *Essays* cover a wide range : fashions, dress, manners, character sketches, letters of travel, ghost stories, satires on common vices, week-end sermons on moral subjects. They are never profound, but they are always pleasant, and their graceful style made such a lasting impression that, half a century later, Dr. Johnson summed up a general judgment when he said :

"Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison."

**Addison and Steele.** Of these two associates Richard Steele (1672-1729) had the more original mind, and his writings reveal a warm, human sympathy that is lacking in the work of his more famous contemporary. But while Addison cultivated his one talent of writing, Steele was like Defoe in that he always had some new project in his head, and some old debt urging him to put the project into immediate execution. He was in turn poet, political pamphleteer, soldier, dramatist, member of Parliament, publisher, manager of a theater, following each occupation eagerly for a brief season, then abandoning it cheerfully for another, — much like a boy picking blueberries in a good place, who moves on and on to find a better bush, eats his berries on the way, and comes home at last with an empty pail.

While holding the political office of "gazetteer" (one who had a monopoly of official news) the idea came to Steele of publishing a literary magazine. The inventive Defoe had already issued *The Review* (1704), but that had a political origin. With the first number of *The Tatler* (1709) the modern magazine made its bow to the public. This little sheet, published thrice a week and sold at a penny a copy, contained more or less politics, to be sure, but the fact that it reflected the gossip of coffeehouses made it instantly popular. After less than two years of triumph Steele lost his official position, and *The Tatler* was discontinued. The idea remained, however, and a few months later appeared *The Spectator* (1711), a daily magazine which eschewed politics and devoted itself to essays, reviews, letters, criticisms, — in short, to "polite" literature. Addison, who had been a contributor to *The Tatler*, entered heartily into the new venture, which had a brief but glorious career. He became known as "Mr. Spectator," and the famous *Spectator Essays* are still commonly attributed to him, though in truth Steele furnished a large part of them.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Of the *Tatler* essays Addison contributed 42, Steele about 180, and some 36 were the work of the two authors in collaboration. Of the *Spectator* essays Addison furnished 274, Steele 236, and about 45 were the work of other writers. In some of the best essays ("Sir Roger de Coverley," for example) the two men worked together. Steele is supposed to have furnished the original ideas, the humor and overflowing kindness of such essays, while the work of polishing and perfecting the style fell to the more skillful Addison.



SIR RICHARD STEELE

From the engraving by Freeman after original  
by J. Richardson

Because of their cultivated prose style, Steele and Addison were long regarded as models, and we are still influenced by Addisonian Style them in the direction of clearness and grace of expression. How wide their influence extended may be seen in American literature. Hardly had *The Spectator* appeared when it crossed the Atlantic and began to dominate our English style on both sides of the ocean. Franklin, in Boston, studied it by night in order to imitate it in the essay which he slipped under the printing-house door next morning; and Boyd, in Virginia, reflects its influence in his charming Journal of exploration. Half a century later, the Hartford Wits were writing clever sketches that seemed like the work of a new "Spectator"; another half century, and Irving, the greatest master of English prose in his day, was still writing in the Addisonian manner, and regretting as he wrote that the leisurely style showed signs, in a bustling age, "of becoming a little old-fashioned."

### DR. JOHNSON AND HIS CIRCLE

Since Caxton established the king's English as a literary language our prose style has often followed the changing fashion of London. Thus, Lyly made it fantastic, Dryden simplified it, Addison gave it grace; and each leader set a fashion which was followed by a host of young writers. Hardly had the Addisonian style crossed the Atlantic, to be the model for American writers for a century, when London acclaimed a new prose fashion — a ponderous, grandiloquent fashion, characterized by mouth-filling words, antithetical sentences, rounded periods, sonorous commonplaces — which was eagerly adopted by orators and historians especially. The man who did more than any other to set this new oratorical fashion in motion was the same Dr. Samuel Johnson who advised young writers to study Addison as a model. And that was only one of his amusing inconsistencies.

Johnson was a man of power, who won a commanding place in English letters by his hard work and his downright sincerity. He won his name of "the great lexicographer" by his *Dictionary*, which we no longer consult, but which we remember as the first attempt at a complete English lexicon. If one asks what else he wrote, with the idea of going to the library and getting a book for pleasure, the answer must be that Johnson's voluminous works are now as dead as his dictionary. One student of literature may be interested in such a melancholy poem as "The Vanity of Human Wishes"; another will be entertained by the anecdotes or blunt criticisms of the *Lives of the Poets*; a third may be uplifted by the *Rambler Essays*, which are well called "majestically moral productions"; but we shall content ourselves here by recording Johnson's own refreshing criticism of certain ancient authors, that "it is idle to criticize what nobody reads." Perhaps the best thing he wrote was a minor work, which he did not know would ever be published. This was his manly Letter to Lord Chesterfield, a nobleman who had treated Johnson with courtesy when the poor author was making a heroic struggle, but who offered his patronage when the *Dictionary* was announced as an epoch-making work. In his noble refusal of all extraneous help Johnson unconsciously voiced Literature's declaration of independence: that henceforth a book must stand or fall on its own merits, and that the day of the literary patron was gone forever.



DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON

From the portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds

**Life.** The story of Johnson's life (1709-1784) has been so well told that one is loath to attempt a summary of it. We note, therefore, a few plain facts: that he was the son of a poor bookseller; that despite poverty and disease he obtained his classic education; that at twenty-six he came to London, and, after an experience with patrons, rebelled against them; that he did every kind of hackwork to earn his bread honestly, living in the very cellar of Grub Street, where he

was often cold and more often hungry; that after nearly thirty years of labor his services to literature were rewarded by a pension, which he shared with the poor; that he then formed the Literary Club (including Reynolds, Pitt, Gibbon, Goldsmith, Burke, and almost every other prominent man in London) and indulged nightly in his famous "conversations," which were either monologues or knockdown arguments; and that in his old age he was regarded as the king of letters, the oracle of literary taste in England.

Such is the bare outline of Johnson's career. To his character, his rough exterior and his kind heart, his vast learning and his Tory prejudices, his piety, his melancholy, his virtues, his frailty, his "mass

of genuine manhood," only a volume could do justice. Happily that volume is at hand. It is Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, a famous book that deserves its fame.

**Boswell's Johnson.** Boswell was an inquisitive barrister who came from Edinburgh to London and thrust himself into the company of great men. To Johnson, then at the summit of his fame, "Bozzy" was devotion itself, following his master about by day or night, refusing to be rebuffed, jotting down notes of what he saw and heard. After Johnson's death he



DR. JOHNSON'S HOUSE (BOLT COURT, FLEET ST.)

From the print by Charles J. Smith

gathered these notes together and, after seven years of labor, produced his incomparable *Life of Johnson* (1791).

The greatness of Boswell's work may be traced to two causes. First, he had a great subject. The story of any human life is interesting, if truthfully told, and Johnson's heroic life of labor and pain and reward was passed in a capital city, among famous men, at a time which witnessed the rapid expansion of a mighty empire. Second, Boswell was as faithful as a man could be to his subject, for whom he had such admiration that even the dictator's frailties seemed more impressive than the virtues of ordinary humanity. So Boswell concealed nothing, and felt no necessity to distribute either praise or blame. He portrayed a man just as that man was, recorded the word just as the word was spoken ; and facing the man we may see his enraptured audience, — at a distance, indeed, but marvelously clear, as when we look through the larger end of a field glass at a landscape dominated by a mountain. One who reads this matchless biography will know Johnson better than he knows his own neighbor ; he will gain, moreover, a better understanding of humanity, to reflect which clearly and truthfully is the prime object of all good literature.

**Edmund Burke** (1729-1797). This brilliant Irishman came up to London as a young man of twenty-one. Within a few years — such was his character, his education, his genius — he had won a reputation among old statesmen as a political



JAMES BOSWELL

philosopher. Then he entered Parliament, where for twenty years the House listened with growing amazement to his rhythmic periods, and he was acclaimed the most eloquent of orators.

Among Burke's numerous works those on America, India and France are deservedly the most famous. Of his orations on American subjects a student of literature or history may profitably read "On Taxation" (1774) and "On Conciliation"

(1775), in which Burke presents the Whig argument in favor of a liberal colonial policy. The Tory view of the same question was bluntly presented by Johnson in his essay "Taxation No Tyranny"; while like a reverberation from America, powerful enough to carry across the Atlantic, came Thomas Paine's "Common Sense," which was a ringing plea for colonial independence.

Of Burke's works pertaining to India "The Nabob of Arcot's Debts" (1785) and the "Impeachment of Warren Hastings" (1786) are interesting to those who can

enjoy a long flight of sustained eloquence. Here again Burke presents the liberal, the humane view of what was then largely a political question; but in his *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790) he goes over to the Tories, thunders against the revolutionists or their English sympathizers, and exalts the undying glories of the British constitution. The *Reflections* is the most brilliant of all Burke's works, and is admired for its superb rhetorical style.



EDMUND BURKE

From the print by John Jones, after Romney

To examine any of these works is to discover the author's characteristic method: first, his framework or argument is carefully constructed so as to appeal to reason; then this framework is buried out of sight and memory by a mass of description, digression, emotional appeal, allusions, illustrative matter from the author's wide reading or from his prolific imagination. Note this passage from the *French Revolution*:

"It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the Queen of France, then the Dauphiness, at Versailles; and surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision. I saw her just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she had just begun to move in, glittering like the morning star, full of life and splendor and joy. Oh, what a revolution! And what a heart must I have to contemplate without emotion that elevation and that fall! Little did I dream, when she added titles of veneration to those of distant, enthusiastic, respectful love, that she should ever be obliged to carry the sharp antidote against disgrace concealed in that bosom; little did I dream that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. But the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists and calculators has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever. Never, never more shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise is gone! It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour, which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage whilst it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil by losing all its grossness."

That is finely expressed, but it has no bearing on the political matter in question; namely, whether the sympathy of England should be extended to the French revolutionists in their struggle for liberty. This irrelevancy of Burke suggests our first criticism: that he is always eloquent, and usually right; but he is seldom convincing, and his eloquence is a hindrance rather than a help to his main purpose. So we are not surprised

to hear that his eloquent speech on Conciliation emptied the benches ; or that after his supreme effort in the impeachment of Hastings — an effort so tremendously dramatic that spectators sobbed, screamed, were carried out in fits — the object of all this invective was acquitted by his judges. Reading the works now, they seem to us praiseworthy not for their sustained eloquence, which is wearisome, but for the brilliancy of certain detached passages which catch the eye like sparkling raindrops after a drenching shower. It was the splendor of such passages, their vivid imagery and harmonious rhythm, which led Matthew Arnold to assert that Burke was the greatest master of prose style in our literature. Anybody can make such an assertion ; nobody can prove or disprove it.

**The Historians.** Perhaps it was the rapid expansion of the empire in the latter part of the eighteenth century which aroused such interest in historical subjects that works of history were then more eagerly welcomed than poetry or fiction. Gibbon says in his *Memoirs* that in his day " history was the most popular species of composition." It was also the best rewarded ; for while Johnson, the most renowned author of his time, wrote a romance (*Rasselas*) hoping to sell it for enough to pay for his mother's funeral, Robertson easily disposed of his *History of the Emperor Charles V* for £4500 ; and there were others who were even better paid for popular histories, the very titles of which are now forgotten.

Of all the historical works of the age, and their name was legion, only one survives with something of its original vitality,

**Gibbon** standing the double test of time and scholarship.

This is *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776), a work which remained famous for a century, and which still has its admiring readers. It was written by Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), who belonged to the Literary Club that gathered about Johnson, and who cultivated his style, he tells us, first by adopting the dictator's rounded periods, and then practicing them " till they moved to flutes and hautboys."

The scope of Gibbon's work is enormous. It begins with the Emperor Trajan (A.D. 98) and carries us through the convulsions of a dying civilization, the descent of the Barbarians on Rome, the spread of Christianity, the Crusades, the rise of Mohammedanism, — through all the confused history of thirteen centuries, ending with the capture of Constantinople by the Turks, in 1453. The mind that could grasp such vast and chaotic materials, arrange them in orderly sequence and present them as in a gorgeous panorama, moves us to wonder. To be sure, there are many things to criticize in Gibbon's masterpiece, — the author's love of mere pageants; his materialism; his inability to understand religious movements, or even religious motives; his lifeless figures, which move as if by mechanical springs, — but one who reads the *Decline and Fall* may be too much impressed by the evidences of scholarship, of vast labor, of genius even, to linger over faults. It is a "monumental" work, most interesting to those who admire monuments; and its style is the perfection of that oratorical, Johnsonese style which was popular in England in 1776, and which, half a century later, found its best American mouthpiece in Daniel Webster. The influence of Gibbon may still be seen in the orators and historians who, lacking the charm of simplicity, clothe even their platitudes in high-sounding phrases.



EDWARD GIBBON

From an enamel by H. Bone, R.A.; after  
Sir Joshua Reynolds

## THE REVIVAL OF ROMANTIC POETRY

Every age has had its romantic poets — that is, poets who sing the dreams and ideals of life, and whose songs seem to be written naturally, spontaneously, as from a full heart<sup>1</sup> — but in the eighteenth century they were completely overshadowed by formal versifiers who made poetry by rule. At that time the imaginative verse which had delighted an earlier age was

regarded much as we now regard an old beaver hat; Shakespeare and Milton were neglected, Spenser was but a name, Chaucer was clean forgotten. If a poet aspired to fame, he imitated the couplets of Dryden or Pope, who, as Cowper said,

Made poetry a mere mechanic art,  
And every warbler has his tune by heart.



THOMAS GRAY

From a portrait by Benjamin Wilson, in the possession of John Murray

Among those who made vigorous protest against the precise and dreary formalism of the age were Collins and Gray, whose names are commonly associated in poetry, as are the names of Addison

and Steele in prose. They had the same tastes, the same gentle melancholy, the same freedom from the bondage of literary fashion. Of the two, William Collins (1721-1759) was perhaps the more gifted poet. His exquisite "Ode to Evening" is without a rival in its own field, and his brief elegy beginning,

<sup>1</sup> For specific examples of formal and romantic poetry see the comparison between Addison and Wordsworth on pages 206-207.

"How sleep the brave," is a worthy commemoration of a soldier's death and a nation's gratitude. It has, says Andrew Lang, the magic of an elder day and of all time.

Thomas Gray (1716-1771) is more widely known than his fellow poet, largely because of one fortunate poem which "returned to men's bosoms" as if sure of its place and welcome. This is the "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1750), which has been translated into all civilized tongues, and which is known, loved, quoted wherever English is spoken.

To criticize this favorite of a million readers

seems almost

Gray's Elegy

ruthless, as if one were pulling a flower to pieces for the sake of giving it a botanical name. A pleasanter task is to explain, if one can, the immense popularity of the "Elegy." The theme is of profound interest to every man who reveres the last resting place of his parents,

to the nation which cherishes every monument of its founders, and even to primitive peoples, like the Indians, who refuse to leave the place where their fathers are buried, and who make the grave a symbol of patriotism. With this great theme our poet is in perfect sympathy. His attitude is simple and reverent; he treads softly, as if on holy ground. The natural setting or atmosphere of his poem, the peace of evening falling on the old churchyard at Stoke Poges, the curfew bell, the cessation of daily toil, the hush which falls upon the twilight landscape



STOKE POGES CHURCHYARD, SHOWING  
PART OF THE CHURCH AND GRAY'S TOMB

like a summons to prayer, — all this is exactly as it should be. Finally, Gray's craftsmanship, his choice of words, his simple figures, his careful fitting of every line to its place and context, is as near perfection as human skill could make it.

Other poems of Gray, which make his little book precious, are the four odes: "To Spring," "On a Distant Prospect of Eton College," "The Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard," the last named being a description of the dramatic end of an old Welsh minstrel, who chants a wild prophecy as he goes to his death. These romantic odes, together with certain translations which Gray made from Norse mythology, mark the end of "classic" domination in English poetry.

### OLIVER GOLDSMITH (1728-1774)

Most versatile of eighteenth-century writers was "poor Noll," a most improvident kind of man in all worldly ways, but so skillful with his pen that Johnson wrote a sincere epitaph to the effect that Goldsmith attempted every form of literature, and adorned everything which he attempted. The form of his verse suggests the formal school, and his polished couplets rival those of Pope; but there the resemblance ceases. In his tenderness and humor, in his homely subjects and the warm human sympathy with which he describes them, Goldsmith belongs to the new romantic school of poetry.

**Life.** The life of Goldsmith has inspired many pens; but the subject, far from being exhausted, is still awaiting the right biographer. The poet's youthful escapades in the Irish country, his classical education at Trinity College, Dublin, and his vagabond studies among gypsies and peddlers, his childish attempts at various professions, his wanderings over Europe, his shifts and makeshifts to earn a living in London, his tilts with Johnson at the Literary Club, his love of gorgeous raiment, his indiscriminate charity, his poverty, his simplicity, his success in the art of writing and his total failure in the art of living, — such kaleidoscopic elements make a brief biography impossible. The character of the man appears in a single incident.

Landing one day on the Continent with a flute, a spare shirt and a guinea as his sole outward possessions, the guinea went for a feast and a game of cards at the nearest inn, and the shirt to the first beggar that asked for it. There remained only the flute, and with that Goldsmith fared forth confidently, like the gleeman of old with his harp, delighted at seeing the world, utterly forgetful of the fact that he had crossed the Channel in search of a medical education.

That aimless, happy-go-lucky journey was typical of Goldsmith's whole life of forty-odd years.

Those who knew him loved but despaired of him. When he passed away (1774) Johnson summed up the feeling of the English literary world in the sentence, "He was a very great man; let not his frailties be remembered."

**Goldsmith's Prose and Verse.** Among the forgotten works of Goldsmith we note with interest several that he wrote for children: a fanciful *History of England*, an entertaining but most unreliable *Animated Nature*, and probably also the tale of "Little Goody Two-shoes." These were written (as were all his other works) to satisfy the demands of his landlady, or to pay an old debt, or to buy a new cloak, — a plum-colored velvet cloak, wherewith to appear at the opera or to dazzle the Literary Club. From among his works we select four, as illustrative of Goldsmith's versatility.

*The Citizen of the World*, a series of letters from an alleged Chinese visitor, invites comparison with the essays of Addison or Steele. All three writers are satirical, all have a high moral



OLIVER GOLDSMITH

After the portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds

purpose, all are masters of a graceful style; but where the "Spectator" touches the surface of life, Goldsmith often goes deeper and probes the very spirit of the eighteenth century. Here is a paragraph from the first letter, in which the alleged



THE "CHESHIRE CHEESE," LONDON, SHOWING  
DR. JOHNSON'S FAVORITE SEAT

The tavern, which still stands, was the favorite haunt of both Johnson and Goldsmith

visitor, who has heard much of the wealth and culture of London, sets down his first impressions :

"From these circumstances in their buildings, and from the dismal looks of the inhabitants, I am induced to conclude that the nation is actually poor; and that, like the Persians, they make a splendid figure everywhere but at home.

The proverb of Xixofou is, that a man's riches may be seen in his eyes: if we judge of the English by this rule, there is not a poorer nation under the sun."

*The Deserted Village* (1770) is the best remembered of Goldsmith's poems, or perhaps one should say "verses" in **The Deserted Village** deference to critics like Matthew Arnold who classify the work with Pope's *Essay on Man*, as a rimed dissertation rather than a true poem.

To compare the two works just mentioned is to discover how far Goldsmith is from his formal model. In Pope's "Essay" we find common sense, moral maxims and some alleged philosophy, but no emotion, no romance, no men or women. The

"Village," on the other hand, is romantic even in desolation ; it awakens our interest, our sympathy ; and it gives us two characters, the Parson and the Schoolmaster, who live in our memories with the best of Chaucer's creations. Moreover, it makes the commonplace life of man ideal and beautiful, and so appeals to readers of widely different tastes or nationalities. Of the many ambitious poems written in the eighteenth century, the two most widely read (aside from the songs of Burns) are Goldsmith's "Village," which portrays the life of simple country people, and Gray's "Elegy," which laments their death.

Goldsmith's one novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), has been well called "the Prince Charming" of our early works of fiction. This work has a threefold distinction : its style alone is enough to make it pleasant reading ; as a story it retains much of its original charm, after a century and a half of proving ; by its moral purity it offered the best kind of rebuke to the vulgar tendency of the early English novel, and influenced subsequent fiction in the direction of cleanliness and decency.

The story is that of a certain vicar, or clergyman, Dr. Primrose and his family, who pass through heavy trials and misfortunes. These might crush or embitter an ordinary man, but they only serve to make the Vicar's love for his children, his trust in God, his tenderness for humanity, shine out more clearly, like stars after a tempest. Mingled with these affecting



CANONBURY TOWER (LONDON)

Goldsmith lived here when he wrote the  
"Vicar of Wakefield"

trials are many droll situations which probably reflect something of the author's personal escapades ; for Goldsmith was the son of a clergyman, and brought himself and his father into his tale. As a novel, that is, a reflection of human life in the form of a story, it contains many weaknesses ; but despite its faults of moralizing and sentimentality, the impression which the story leaves is one of "sweetness and light." Swinburne says that, of all novels he had seen rise and fall in three generations, *The Vicar of Wakefield* alone had retained the same high level in the opinion of its readers.

Another notable work is Goldsmith's comedy *She Stoops to Conquer*. The date of that comedy (1773) recalls the fact that, *She Stoops to Conquer* though it has been played for nearly a century and a half, during which a thousand popular plays have been forgotten, it is still a prime favorite on the amateur stage. Perhaps the only other comedies of which the same can be said with approximate truth are *The Rivals* (1775) and *The School for Scandal* (1777) of Richard Brinsley Sheridan.

The plot of *She Stoops to Conquer* is said to have been suggested by one of Goldsmith's queer adventures. He arrived one day at a village, riding a borrowed nag, and with the air of a lordly traveler asked a stranger to direct him "to the best house in the place." The stranger misunderstood, or else was a rare wag, for he showed the way to the abode of a wealthy gentleman. There Goldsmith made himself at home, ordered the servants about, invited his host to share a bottle of wine, — in short, made a great fool of himself. Evidently the host was also a wag, for he let the joke run on till the victim was ready to ride away.<sup>1</sup>

From some such crazy escapade Goldsmith made his comedy of manners, a lively, rollicking comedy of topsy-turvy scenes, all hinging upon the incident of mistaking a private house for a public inn. We have called *She Stoops to Conquer* a comedy

<sup>1</sup> There is some doubt as to the source of Goldsmith's plot. It may have been suggested by an earlier French comedy by Marivaux.

of eighteenth-century manners, but our continued interest in its absurdities would seem to indicate that it is a comedy of human nature in all ages.

### ROBERT BURNS (1759-1796)

Burns is everywhere acclaimed the poet of Scotland, and for two good reasons: because he reflects better than any other the emotions of the Scottish people, and because his book is a summary of the best verse of his native land. Practically all his songs, such as "Bonnie Doon" and "Auld Lang Syne," are late echoes of much older verses; his more ambitious poems borrow their ideas, their satire or sentiment, their form even, from Ferguson, Allan Ramsay and other poets, all of whom aimed (as Scott aimed in "Lochinvar") to preserve the work of unnamed minstrels whose lines had been repeated in Highlands or Lowlands for two centuries. Burns may be regarded, therefore, as a treasury of all that is best in Scottish song. His genius was to take this old material, dear to the heart of the native, and give it final expression.



ROBERT BURNS  
After Alexander Nasmyth

**Life.** The life of Burns is one to discourage a biographer who does not relish the alternative of either concealing the facts or apologizing for his subject. We shall record here only a few personal matters which may help us to understand Burns's poetry.

Perhaps the most potent influence in his life was that which came from his labor in the field. He was born in a clay biggin, or cottage, in the parish of Alloway, near the little town of Ayr:

Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses  
For honest men and bonnie lasses.

His father was a poor crofter, a hard-working, God-fearing man of the Covenanter type, who labored unceasingly to earn a living from the soil of a rented farm. The children went barefoot in all seasons; almost from the time they could walk they were expected to labor; and



"ELLISLAND"

The hundred-acre farm near Dumfries, where Burns worked as a farmer. The happiest days of his life were spent here, 1787-1791

at thirteen Bobbie was doing a man's work at the plow or the reaping. The toil was severe; the reward, at best, was to escape dire poverty or disgraceful debt; but there was yet a nobility in the life which is finely reflected in "The Cotter's Saturday Night," a poem which ranks with Whittier's "Snow Bound" among the best that labor has ever inspired.

As a farmer's boy Burns worked in the open, in close contact with nature, and the result is evident in all his verse. Sunshine or storm, **The Element** bird song or winter wind, the flowers, the stars, the dew of Nature of the morning,—open Burns where you will, and you are face to face with these elemental realities. Sometimes his reflection of nature is exquisitely tender, as in "To a Mouse" or "To a

Mountain Daisy"; but for the most part he regards nature not sentimentally, like Gray, or religiously, like Wordsworth and Bryant, but in a breezy, companionable way which suggests the song of "Under the Greenwood Tree" in *As You Like It*.

Another influence in Burns's life came from his elementary education. There were no ancient classics studied in the school which he His attended, — fortunately, perhaps, for his best work is free Education from the outworn classical allusions which decorate the bulk of eighteenth-century verse. In the evening he listened to tales from Scottish history, which stirred him deeply and made him live in a present world rather than in the misty region of Greek mythology. One result of this education was the downright honesty of Burns's poems. Here is no echo from a vanished world of gods and goddesses, but the voice of a man, living, working, feeling joy or sorrow in the presence of everyday nature and humanity.

For another formative influence Burns was indebted to Betty Davidson, a relative and an inmate of the household, who carried such a stock of old wives' tales as would scare any child into fits on a dark night. Hear Burns speak of her:

"She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantrips, giants, enchanted towers, dragons, and other trumpery. This cultivated the latent seeds of poetry, but had so strong an effect upon my imagination that to this hour, in my nocturnal rambles, I sometimes keep a sharp look-out in suspicious places."

Reflections of these grotesque superstitions appear in such poems as the "Address to the Deil" and "Tam o' Shanter." The latter is commonly named as one of the few original works of Burns, but it is probably a retelling of some old witch-tale of Betty Davidson.

The evil influence in Burns's life may be only suggested. It leads first to the tavern, to roistering and dissipation, to entanglements in Evil Elements vulgar love affairs; then swiftly to the loss of a splendid poetic gift, to hopeless debts, to degrading poverty, to an untimely death. Burns had his chance, if ever poet had it, after the publication of his first book (the famous Kilmarnock edition of 1786) when he was called in triumph to Edinburgh. There he sold another edition of his poems for a sum that seemed fabulous to a poor crofter; whereupon he bought a farm and married his Jean Armour. He was

acclaimed throughout the length and breadth of his native land ; his poems were read by the wise and by the ignorant ; he was the poet of Scotland, and the nation, proud of its gifted son, stood ready to honor and follow him. But the old habits were too strong, and Burns took the downhill road. To this element of dissipation we owe his occasional bitterness, railing and coarseness, which make an expurgated edition of his poems essential to one who would enjoy the reading.

There is another element, often emphasized for its alleged influence on Burns's poetry. During his lifetime the political world



THE VILLAGE OF TARBOLTON, NEAR WHICH BURNS LIVED WHEN ABOUT  
NINETEEN YEARS OLD

was shaken by the American and French revolutions ; democracy was in the air, and the watchwords "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" inspired many a song besides the *Marseillaise* and many a document besides the Declaration of Independence. That Burns was aware of this political commotion is true, but he was not much influenced by it. He was at home only in his own Scottish field, and even there his interests were limited, — not to be compared with those of Walter Scott, for example. When the Bastille was stormed, and the world stood aghast, Burns was too much engrossed in personal matters to be greatly moved by distant affairs in France. Not to the Revolution, therefore, but to his Scottish blood do we owe the thrilling "Scots Wha Hae," one of the world's best battle songs ; not to the

new spirit of democracy abroad but to the old Covenanter spirit at home do we owe "A Man's a Man for a' That" with its assertion of elemental manhood.

**The Songs of Burns.** From such an analysis of Burns's life one may forecast his subject and his method. Living intensely in a small field, he must discover that there are just two poetic subjects of abiding interest. These are Nature and Humanity, and of these Burns must write from first-hand knowledge, simply, straightforwardly, and with sincerity. Moreover, as Burns lives in an intense way, reading himself rather than books, he must discover that the ordinary man is more swayed by strong feeling than by logical reasons. He will write, therefore, of the common emotions that lie between the extremes of laughter and tears, and his appeal will be to the heart rather than to the head of his reader.

This emotional power of Burns, his masterful touch upon human heartstrings, is the first of his poetic qualities; and he has others which fairly force themselves upon the attention. For example, many of his lyrics ("Auld Lang Syne," "Banks o' Doon," "Flow Gently, Sweet Afton," "O Wert Thou in the Cauld Blast") have been repeatedly set to music; and the reason is that they were written to music, that in such poems Burns was refashioning some old material to the tune of a Scottish song. There is a singing quality in his poetry which not only makes it pleasant reading but which is apt to set the words tripping to melody. For a specific example take this stanza from "Of a' the Airts," a lyric which one can hardly read without making a tune to match it:



AULD ALLOWAY KIRK

Made famous by the poem of  
"Tam o' Shanter"

I see her in the dewy flow'rs,  
 I see her sweet and fair;  
 I hear her in the tunefu' birds,  
 I hear her charm the air:  
 There's not a bonie flow'r that springs  
 By fountain, shaw or green,  
 There's not a bonie bird that sings,  
 But minds me o' my Jean.

Sympathy is another marked characteristic of Burns, a wide, all-embracing sympathy that knows no limit save for hypocrites, at whom he pointed his keenest satire. His feeling for nature is reflected in "To a Mouse" and "To a Daisy"; his comradeship with noble men appears in "The Cotter's Saturday Night," with riotous and bibulous men in "The Jolly Beggars," with smugglers and their ilk in "The Deil's Awa' with the Exciseman,"<sup>1</sup> with patriots in "Bannockburn," with men who mourn in "To Mary in Heaven," and with all lovers in a score of famous lyrics. Side by side with Burns's sympathy (for Smiles live next door to Tears) appears his keen sense of humor, a humor that is sometimes rollicking, as in "Contented wi' Little," and again too broad for decency. For the most part, however, Burns contents himself with dry, quiet sarcasm delivered with an air of great seriousness :

Ah, gentle dames, it gars me greet  
 To think how mony counsels sweet,  
 How mony lengthened sage advices  
 The husband frae the wife despises !

**Why Burns is Read.** Such qualities, appearing on almost every page of Burns's little book of poetry, show how widely he differs from the formal school of Pope and Dryden. They labor to compose poetry, while Burns gives the impression of singing, as naturally as a child sings from a full heart. Again, most eighteenth-century poets wrote for the favored few, but

<sup>1</sup> Burns was himself an exciseman; that is, a collector of taxes on alcoholic liquors. He wrote this song while watching a smuggler's craft, and waiting in the storm for officers to come and make an arrest.

Burns wrote for all his neighbors. His first book was bought by farmers, plowboys, milkmaids,—by every Lowlander who could scrape together three shillings to buy a treasure. Then scholars got hold of it, taking it from humble hands, and Burns was called to Edinburgh to prepare a larger edition of his songs. For a half-century Scotland kept him to herself;<sup>1</sup> then his work went wide in the world, to be read again by plain men and women, by sailors on the sea, by soldiers round the campfire, by farmers, mechanics, tradesmen, who in their new homes in Australia or America warmed themselves at the divine fire which was kindled, long ago, in the little clay biggin at Alloway.

If one should ask,  
Why this world-wide wel-  
come to Burns,  
The Genius of Burns the while Pope  
remains a mark for literary criticism? the answer is that Burns has a most extraordinary power of touching the hearts of common men. He is one of the most democratic

of poets; he takes for his subject a simple experience—a family gathering at eventide, a fair, a merrymaking, a joy, a grief, the finding of a flower, the love of a lad for a lass—and with rare simplicity reflects the emotion that such an experience awakens. Seen through the poet's eyes, this simple emotion becomes radiant and lovely, a thing not of earth but



BURNS'S MAUSOLEUM

<sup>1</sup> Up to 1850 Burns was rarely mentioned in treatises on English literature. One reason for his late recognition was that the Lowland vocabulary employed in most of his poems was only half intelligible to the ordinary English reader.

of heaven. That is the genius of Burns, to ennoble human feeling, to reveal some hidden beauty in a commonplace experience. The luminous world of fine thought and fine emotion which we associate with the name of poetry he opened not to scholars alone but to all humble folk who toil and endure. As a shoemaker critic once said, "Burns confirms my former suspicion that the world was made for me as well as for Cæsar."

### MINOR POETS OF ROMANTICISM

There were other poets who aided in the romantic revival, and among them William Cowper (1731–1800) is one of the

most notable. His most ambitious works, such as *The Task* and the translation of Homer into blank verse, have fallen into neglect, and he is known to modern readers chiefly by a few familiar hymns and by the ballad of "John Gilpin."

Less gifted but more popular than Cowper was James Macpherson (1736–1796), who made a sensation that spread rapidly over Europe and America with his *Fingal* (1762) and other works of the same kind, — wildly heroic poems which, he alleged, were translations from Celtic manuscripts written by an ancient bard named Ossian. Another and better literary forgery appeared in a

series of ballads called *The Rowley Papers*, dealing with mediæval themes. These were written by "the marvelous boy"



WILLIAM COWPER

From the rare engraving by W. Blake (1802). After the painting by T. Lawrence, R.A. (1793)

Thomas Chatterton (1752–1770), who professed to have found the poems in a chest of old manuscripts. The success of these forgeries, especially of the "Ossian" poems, is an indication of the awakened interest in medieval poetry and legend which characterized the whole romantic movement.

In this connection, Thomas Percy (1729–1811) did a notable work when he published, after years of research, his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). This was a collection of old ballads, which profoundly influenced Walter Scott, and which established a foundation for all later works of balladry.

Another interesting figure in the romantic revival is William Blake (1757–1827), a strange, mystic child, a veritable John o' Dreams, whom some call madman because of his huge, chaotic, unintelligible poems, but whom others regard as the supreme poetical genius of the eighteenth century. His only readable works are the boyish *Poetical Sketches* (1783) and two later volumes called *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* (1794). Even these contain much to make us question Blake's sanity; but they contain also a few lyrics that might have been written by an elf rather than a man,—beautiful, elusive lyrics that haunt us like a strain of gypsy music, a memory of childhood, a bird song in the night:

Can the eagle see what is in the pit,  
Or wilt thou go ask the mole?  
Can wisdom be put in a silver rod,  
Or love in a golden bowl?

In the witchery of these lyrics eighteenth-century poetry appears commonplace; but they attracted no attention, even "Holy Thursday," the sweetest song of poor children ever written, passing unnoticed. That did not trouble Blake, however, who cared nothing for rewards. He was a childlike soul, well content

To see the world in a grain of sand,  
And a heaven in a wild flower;  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour.

## THE EARLY ENGLISH NOVEL

An important literary event of the eighteenth century was the appearance of the modern novel. This invention, generally credited to the English, differs radically from the old romance, which was known to all civilized peoples. Walter Scott made the following distinction between the two types of fiction: the romance is a story in which our interest centers in marvelous incidents, brought to pass by extraordinary or superhuman characters; the novel is a story which is more natural, more in harmony with our experience of life. Such a definition, though faulty, is valuable in that it points to the element of imagination as the distinguishing mark between the romance and the true novel.

Take, for example, the romances of Arthur or Sindbad or the Green Knight. Here are heroes of more than human endurance, ladies of surpassing loveliness, giants, dragons, enchanters, marvelous adventures in the land of imagination. Such fanciful stories, valuable as a reflection of the ideals of different races, reached their highest point in the Middle Ages, when they were used to convey the ideals of chivalry and knightly duty. They grew more fantastic as they ran to seed, till in the Elizabethan age they had degenerated into picaresque stories (from *pícaro*, "a rogue") which recounted the adventures not of a noble knight but of some scoundrel or outcast. They were finally laughed out of literature in numerous burlesques, of which the most famous is *Don Quixote* (1605). In the humor of this story, in the hero's fighting windmills and meeting so many adventures that he had no time to breathe, we have an excellent criticism not of chivalry, as is sometimes alleged, but of extravagant popular romances on the subject.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Don Quixote* is commonly named as a type of extravagant humor, but from another viewpoint it is a sad book, intensely sad. For it recounts the experience of a man who had a knightly heart and who believed the world to be governed by knightly ideals, but who went forth to find a world filled with vulgarity and villainy.

Compare now these old romances with *Ivanhoe* or *Robinson Crusoe* or *Lorna Doone* or *A Tale of Two Cities*. In each of

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the last-named novels one may find three elements: a story, a study, and an exercise of the creative imagination. A modern work of fiction must still have a good story, if anybody is to read it; must contain also a study or observation of humanity, not of superhuman heroes but of men and women who work or play or worship in close relationship to their fellows. Finally, the story and the study must be fused by the imagination, which selects or creates various scenes, characters, incidents, and which orders or arranges its materials so as to make a harmonious work that appeals to our sense of truth and beauty; in other words, a work of art.

Such is the real novel, a well-told story in tune with human experience, holding true to life, exercising fancy but keeping it under control, arousing thought as well as feeling, and appealing to our intellect as well as to our imagination.<sup>1</sup>

**Defoe (1661-1731).** Among the forerunners of the modern novel is Daniel Foe, author of *Robinson Crusoe*, who began to call himself "Defoe" after he attained fame. He produced an amazing variety of wares: newspapers, magazines, ghost stories, biographies, journals, memoirs, satires, picaresque romances, essays on religion, reform, trade, projects, — in all more than two hundred works. These were written in a picturesque style and with such a wealth of detail that, though barefaced inventions

<sup>1</sup> This convenient division of prose fiction into romances and novels is open to challenge. Some critics use the name "novel" for any work of prose fiction. They divide novels into two classes, stories (or short stories) and romances. The story relates simple or detached incidents; the romance deals with life in complex relations, dominated by strong emotions, especially by the emotion of love.

Other critics arrange prose fiction in the following classes: novels of adventure (*Robinson Crusoe*, *The Last of the Mohicans*), historical novels (*Ivanhoe*, *The Spy*), romantic novels (*Lorna Doone*, *The Heart of Midlothian*), novels of manners (*Cranford*, *Pride and Prejudice*), novels of personality (*Silas Marner*, *The Scarlet Letter*), novels of purpose (*Oliver Twist*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*).

Still another classification arranges fiction under two heads, romance and realism. In the romance, which portrays unusual incidents or characters, we see the ideal, the poetic side of humanity; in the realistic novel, dealing with ordinary men and women, the prosaic element of life is emphasized.

for the most part, they passed for veracious chronicles. One critic, thinking of the vividly realistic *Journal of the Plague Year* and *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, says that "Defoe wrote history, but invented the facts"; another declares that "the one little art of which Defoe was past master was the art of forging a story and imposing it on the world as truth." The long list

of his works ends with a *History of the Devil*, in 1726.



DANIEL DEFOE

journalist he invented the modern magazine (his *Review* appeared in 1704, five years before Steele's *Tatler*); also he projected the interview, the editorial, the "scoop," and other features which still figure in our newspapers. As a hired pamphleteer, writing satires against Whigs or Tories, he learned so many political secrets that when one party fell he was the best possible man to be employed by the other. While sitting in the stocks (in punishment for writing a satirical pamphlet that set Tories and Churchmen by the ears) he made such a hit with his doggerel verses against the authorities that crowds came to the pillory to cheer him and to buy his poem. While in durance

Foe's career was an extraordinary one. By nature and training he seems to have preferred devious ways to straight, and to have concealed his chief motive whether he appeared as reformer or politician, tradesman or writer, police-spy or friend of outcasts. His education, which he picked up from men and circumstance, was more varied than any university could have given him. Perhaps the chief factor in this practical education was his ability to turn every experience to profitable account. As a

vile, in the old Newgate Prison, he mingled freely with all sorts of criminals (there were no separate cells in those days), won their secrets, and used them to advantage in his picaresque romances. He learned also so much of the shady side of London life that no sooner was he released than he was employed as a secret-service agent, or spy, by the government which had jailed him.

It is as difficult to find the real Foe amidst such devious trails as to determine where a caribou is from the maze of footprints which he leaves behind him. He seems to have been untiring in his effort to secure better treatment of outcast folk ; he speaks of himself, with apparent sincerity, as having received his message from the Divine Spirit ; but the impression which he made upon the upper classes was reflected by Swift, who called him "a grave, dogmatical rogue." For many years he was a popular hero, trusted not only by the poor but by the criminal classes (ordinarily keen judges of honesty in other men), until his secret connection with the government became known. Then suspicion fell upon him ; his popularity was destroyed and he fled from London. The last few years of his life were spent in hiding from real or imaginary enemies.

Defoe was approaching his sixtieth year when he wrote *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), a story which has been read throughout the civilized world, and which, after two centuries of life, is still young and vigorous. The first charm of the book is in its moving adventures, which are surprising enough to carry us through the moralizing passages.



CUPOLA HOUSE  
Defoe's residence at Bury

These also have their value; for who ever read them without asking, What would I have done or thought or felt under such circumstances? The work of society is now so comfortably divided that one seldom dreams of being his own mechanic, farmer, hunter, herdsman, cook and tailor, as Crusoe was. Thinking of his experience we are brought face to face with our dependence on others, with our debt to the countless, unnamed men whose labor made civilization possible. We understand also the pioneers, who in the far, lonely places of the earth have won a home and country from the wilderness.

When the adventures are duly appreciated we discover another charm of *Robinson Crusoe*, namely, its intense reality. Defoe had that experience of many projects, and that vivid imagination, which enabled him to put himself in the place of his hero,<sup>1</sup> to anticipate his needs, his feelings, his labors and triumph. That Crusoe was heroic none will deny; yet his heroism was of a different kind from that which we meet in the old romances. Here was no knight "without fear and without reproach," but a plain man with his strength and weakness. He despaired like other men; but instead of giving way to despair he drew up a list of his blessings and afflictions, "like debtor and creditor," found a reasonable balance in his favor, and straightway conquered himself,—which is the first task of all real heroes. Again, he had horrible fears; he beat his breast, cried out as one in mortal terror; then "I thought that would do little good, so I began to make a raft." So he overcame his fears, as he overcame the difficulties of the place, by setting himself to do alone what a whole race of men had done before him. *Robinson Crusoe* is therefore history as well as fiction; its subject is not Alexander Selkirk but *Homo Sapiens*; its lesson is the everlasting triumph of will and work.

<sup>1</sup> The basis of *Robinson Crusoe* was the experience of an English sailor, Alexander Selkirk, or Selcraig, who was marooned on the lonely island of Juan Fernandez, off the coast of Chile. There he lived in solitude for the space of five years before he was rescued. When Selkirk returned to England (1709) an account of his adventures appeared in the public press.

**Richardson.** One morning in 1740 the readers of London found a new work for sale in the bookshops. It was made up of alleged letters from a girl to her parents, a sentimental girl who opened her heart freely, explaining its hopes, fears, griefs, temptations, and especially its moral sensibilities. Such a work of fiction was unique at that time. Delighted readers waited for another and yet another volume of the same story, till more than a year had passed and *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* reached its happy ending.

The book made a sensation in England ; it was speedily translated, and repeated its triumph on the other side of the Channel. Comparatively few people could read it now without being bored, but it is famous in the history of literature as the first English novel ; that is, a story of a human life under stress of emotion, told by one who understood the tastes of his own age, and who strove to keep his work true to human nature in all ages.

The author of *Pamela*, Samuel Richardson (1689-1761), was a very proper person, well satisfied with himself, who conducted a modest business as printer and bookseller. For years he had practiced writing, and had often been employed by sentimental young women who came to him for model love letters. Hence the extraordinary knowledge of feminine feelings which Richardson displayed ; hence also the epistolary form in which his novels were written. His aim in all his work was to teach morality and correct deportment. His strength was in his power to analyze and portray emotions. His weakness lay in his vanity, which led him to shun masculine society and to foregather at tea tables with women who flattered him.

Led by the success of *Pamela*, which portrayed the feelings of a servant girl, the author began another series of letters which ended in the eight-volume novel *Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady* (1748). The story appeared in installments, which were awaited with feverish impatience till the agony drew to an end, and the heroine died amid the sobs of

ten thousand readers. Yet the story had power, and the central figure of Clarissa was impressive in its pathos and tragedy. The novel would still be readable if it were stripped of the stilted conversations and sentimental gush in which Richardson delighted ; but that would leave precious little of the story.

**Fielding.** In vigorous contrast with the prim and priggish Richardson is Henry Fielding (1707-1754), a big, jovial, reckless man, full of animal spirits, who was ready to mitigate any man's troubles or forget his own by means of a punch bowl or a venison potpie. He was noble born, but seems to have been thrown on the world to shift for himself. After an excellent education he studied law, and was for some years a police magistrate, in which position he increased his large knowledge of the seamy side of life. He had a pen for vigorous writing, and after squandering two modest fortunes (his own and his wife's) he proceeded to earn his living by writing buffooneries for the stage. Then appeared Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, and in ridiculing its sentimental heroine Fielding found his vocation as a novelist.

He began *Joseph Andrews* (1742) as a joke, by taking for his hero an alleged brother of Pamela, who was also virtuous but whose reward was to be kicked out of doors. Then the story took to the open road, among the inns and highways of an age when traveling in rural England was almost as adventurous as campaigning in Flanders. In the joy of his story Fielding soon forgot his burlesque of Richardson, and attempted what he called a realistic novel ; that is, a story of real life. The morality and decorum which Richardson exalted appeared to Fielding as hypocrisy ; so he devoted himself to a portrayal of men and manners as he found them.

Undoubtedly there were plenty of good men and manners at that time, but Fielding had a vagabond taste that delighted in rough scenes, and of these also eighteenth-century England could furnish an abundance. Hence his *Joseph Andrews* is a picture not of English society, as is often alleged, but only of

the least significant part of society. The same is true of *Tom Jones* (1749), which is the author's most vigorous work, and of *Amelia* (1751), in which, though he portrays one good woman, he repeats many of the questionable incidents of his earlier works.

There is power in all these novels, the power of keen observation, of rough humor, of downright sincerity; but unhappily the power often runs to waste in long speeches to the reader, in descriptions of brutal or degrading scenes, and in a wholly unnecessary coarseness of expression.

**Influence of the Early Novels.** The idea of the modern novel seems to have been developed by several English authors, each of whom, like pioneers in a new country, left his stamp on subsequent works in the same field. Richardson's governing motive may be summed up in the word "sensibility," which means "delicacy of feeling," and which was a fashion, almost a fetish, in eighteenth-century society. Because it was deemed essential to display proper or decorous feeling on all occasions, Richardson's heroines were always analyzing their emotions; they talked like a book of etiquette; they indulged in tears, fainting, transports of joy, paroxysms of grief, apparently striving to make themselves as unlike a real woman as possible. It is astonishing how far and wide this fad of sensibility spread through the literary world, and how many gushing heroines of English and American fiction during the next seventy-five years were modeled on *Pamela* or *Clarissa*.

In view of this artificial fashion, the influence of Fielding was like the rush of crisp air into a hot house. His aim was realistic, that is, to portray real people in their accustomed ways. Unfortunately his aim was spoiled by the idea that to be realistic one must go to the gutter for material. And then appeared Goldsmith, too much influenced by the fad of sensibility, but aiming to depict human life as governed by high ideals, and helping to cleanse the English novel from brutality and indecency.

There were other early novelists, a host of them, but in Richardson, Fielding and Goldsmith we have enough. Richardson <sup>Threefold Influence</sup> son emphasized the analysis of human feeling or motive, and that of itself was excellent; but his exaggerated sentimentality set a bad fashion which our novelists were almost a century in overcoming. Fielding laid stress on realism, and that his influence was effective is shown in the work of his disciple Thackeray, who could be realistic without being coarse. And Goldsmith made all subsequent novelists his debtors by exalting that purity of domestic life to which every home worthy of the name forever strives or aspires.

If it be asked, What novels of the early type ought one to read? the answer is simple. Unless you want to curdle your blood by a tale of mystery and horror (in which case Mrs. Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* will serve the purpose) there are only two that young readers will find satisfactory: the realistic *Robinson Crusoe* by Defoe, and the romantic *Vicar of Wakefield* by Goldsmith.

**Summary.** What we call eighteenth-century literature appeared between two great political upheavals, the English Revolution of 1688 and the French Revolution of 1789. Some of the chief characteristics of that literature—such as the emphasis on form, the union of poetry with politics, the prevalence of satire, the interest in historical subjects—have been accounted for, in part at least, in our summary of the history of the period.

The writings of the century are here arranged in three main divisions: the reign of formalism (mislabeled classicism), the revival of romantic poetry, and the development of the modern novel. Our study of the so-called classic period includes: (1) The meaning of classicism in literature. (2) The life and works of Pope, the leading poet of the age; of Swift, a master of satire; of Addison and Steele, the graceful essayists who originated the modern literary magazine. (3) The work of Dr. Johnson and his school; in which we have included, for convenience, Edmund Burke, most eloquent of English orators, and Gibbon the historian, famous for his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

Our review of the romantic writers of the age covers: (1) The work of Collins and Gray, whose imaginative poems are in refreshing contrast to the formalism of Pope and his school. (2) The life and works of Goldsmith, poet, playwright, novelist; and of Burns, the greatest of Scottish song

writers. (3) A glance at other poets, such as Cowper and Blake, who aided in the romantic revival. (4) The renewed interest in ballads and legends, which showed itself in Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, and in two famous forgeries, the *Ossian* poems of Macpherson and *The Rowley Papers* of the boy Chatterton.

Our study of the novel includes: (1) The meaning of the modern novel, as distinct from the ancient romance. (2) A study of Defoe, author of *Robinson Crusoe*, who was a forerunner of the modern realistic novelist. (3) The works of Richardson and of Fielding, contrasting types of eighteenth-century story-tellers. (4) The influence of Richardson's sentimentality, of Fielding's realism, and of Goldsmith's moral purity on subsequent English fiction.

**Selections for Reading.** Typical selections are given in Manly, English Poetry and English Prose, Century Readings, and other miscellaneous collections. Important works of major writers are published in inexpensive editions for school use, a few of which are named below.

Pope's poems, selected, in Standard English Classics, Pocket Classics, Riverside Literature, and other series. (See Texts, in General Bibliography.)

Selections from Swift's works, in Athenæum Press, Holt's English Readings, Clarendon Press. Gulliver's Travels, in Standard English Classics, in Ginn and Company's Classics for Children, in Carisbrooke Library, in Temple Classics.

Selections from Addison and Steele, in Athenæum Press, Golden Treasury, Maynard's English Classics. Sir Roger de Coverley Papers, in Standard English Classics, Riverside Literature, Academy Classics.

Chesterfield's Letters to his son, selected, in Ginn and Company's Classics for Children, and in Maynard's English Classics.

Boswell's Life of Johnson, in Clarendon Press, Temple Classics, Everyman's Library.

Burke's Speeches, selected, in Standard English Classics, Pocket Classics, English Readings.

Selections from Gray, in Athenæum Press, Canterbury Poets, Riverside Literature.

Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* and *Vicar of Wakefield*, in Standard English Classics, King's Classics: *She Stoops to Conquer*, in Pocket Classics, Belles Lettres Series, Cassell's National Library.

Sheridan's *The Rivals*, in Athenæum Press, Camelot Series, Riverside Literature, Everyman's Library.

Poems of Burns, selected, in Standard English Classics, Riverside Literature, Silver Classics.

Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, school edition by Ginn and Company; the same in Everyman's Library, Pocket Classics.

**Bibliography.** For extensive manuals and texts see the General Bibliography. The following works deal chiefly with the eighteenth century.

**History.** Morris, *Age of Queen Anne and the Early Hanoverians* (Epochs of Modern History Series); Sydney, *England and the English in the Eighteenth Century*; Susan Hale, *Men and Manners in the Eighteenth Century*; Ashton, *Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne*; Thackeray, *The Four Georges*.

**Literature.** L. Stephen, *English Literature in the Eighteenth Century*; Perry, *English Literature in the Eighteenth Century*; Seccombe, *The Age of Johnson*; Dennis, *The Age of Pope*; Gosse, *History of English Literature in the Eighteenth Century*; Whitwell, *Some Eighteenth-Century Men of Letters*; Phelps, *Beginnings of the English Romantic Movement*; Beers, *English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century*; Thackeray, *English Humorists*.

**Pope.** Life, by Courthope; by L. Stephen (English Men of Letters Series). Essays, by Thackeray, in *English Humorists*; by L. Stephen, in *Hours in a Library*; by Lowell, in *My Study Windows*.

**Swift.** Life, by Forster; by L. Stephen (E. M. of L.). Essays, by Thackeray, in *English Humorists*; by Dobson, in *Eighteenth Century Vignettes*.

**Addison and Steele.** Life of Addison, by Courthope (E. M. of L.). Life of Steele, by Dobson. Essays by Macaulay, by Thackeray, by Dobson.

**Johnson.** Life, by Boswell (for personal details); by L. Stephen (E. M. of L.). Hill, *Dr. Johnson: his Friends and his Critics*. Essays by Macaulay, by Thackeray, by L. Stephen.

**Burke.** Life, by Morley (E. M. of L.), by Prior. Macknight, *Life and Times of Burke*.

**Gibbon.** Life, by Morrison (E. M. of L.). Essays, by Birrell, in *Collected Essays*; by L. Stephen, in *Studies of a Biographer*; by Harrison, in *Ruskin and Other Literary Estimates*; by Sainte-Beuve, in *English Portraits*.

**Gray.** Life, by Gosse. Essays by Lowell, M. Arnold, L. Stephen, Dobson.

**Goldsmith.** Life, by Washington Irving, by Dobson (Great Writers Series), by Black (E. M. of L.), by Forster. Essays, by Macaulay; by Thackeray, in *English Humorists*; by Dobson, in *Miscellanies*.

**Burns.** Life, by Shairp (E. M. of L.), by Blackie (Great Writers). Carlyle's *Essay on Burns*, in Standard English Classics and other school editions. Essays, by Stevenson, in *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*; by Hazlitt, in *Lectures on the English Poets*; by Henley, in *Introduction to the Cambridge Edition of Burns*.

**The Novel.** Raleigh, *The English Novel*; Cross, *Development of the English Novel*; Perry, *A Study of Prose Fiction*; Symonds, *Introduction to the Study of English Fiction*; Dawson, *Makers of English Fiction*.

*Defoe.* Life, by Minto (E. M. of L.), by William Lee. Essay by L. Stephen, in *Hours in a Library*.

*Richardson.* Life, by Thomson, by Dobson. Essays, by L. Stephen, in *Hours in a Library*; by Dobson, in *Eighteenth Century Vignettes*.

*Fielding.* Life, by Dobson (E. M. of L.). Lawrence, *Life and Times of Fielding*. Essays by Lowell, L. Stephen, Dobson; Thackeray, in *English Humorists*; G. B. Smith, in *Poets and Novelists*.

*Fiction.* Thackeray, *Henry Esmond*, and *The Virginians*; Scott, *Guy Mannering*, *Rob Roy*, *Heart of Midlothian*, *Redgauntlet*; Reade, *Peg Woffington*.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

Two voices are there; one is of the sea,  
One of the mountains; each a mighty voice:  
In both from age to age thou didst rejoice,  
They were thy chosen music, Liberty!

Wordsworth, "Sonnet to Switzerland"

The many changes recorded in the political and literary history of nineteenth-century England may be grouped under two heads: the progress of democracy in government, and the triumph of romanticism in literature. By democracy we mean the assumption by common men of the responsibilities of government, with a consequent enlargement of human liberty. Romanticism, as we use the term here, means simply that literature, like politics, has become liberalized; that it is concerned with the common life of men, and that the delights of literature, like the powers of government, are no longer the possession of the few but of the many.

**Historical Outline.** To study either democracy or romanticism, the Whig party or the poetry of Wordsworth, is to discover how greatly England was influenced by matters that appeared beyond her borders. The famous Reform Bill (1832) which established manhood suffrage, the emancipation of the slaves in all British colonies, the hard-won freedom of the press, the plan of popular education,—these and numberless other reforms of the age may be regarded as part of a general movement, as the attempt to fulfill in England a promise made to the world by two events which occurred earlier and on foreign soil. These two events, which profoundly influenced English politics and literature, were the Declaration of Independence and the French Revolution.

In the Declaration we read, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by Two Revolutions their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Glorious words! But they were not new; they were old and familiar when Jefferson wrote them. The American Revolution, which led up to the Declaration, is especially significant in this: that it began as a struggle not for new privileges but for old rights. So the constructive character of that Revolution, which ended with a democracy and a noble constitution, was due largely to the fact that brave men stood ready to defend the old freedom, the old manhood, the old charters, "the good old cause" for which other brave men had lived or died through a thousand years.

A little later, and influenced by the American triumph, came another uprising of a different kind. In France the unalienable rights of man had been forgotten during ages of tyranny and class privilege; so the French Revolution, shouting its watchwords of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, had no conception of that liberty and equality which were as ancient as the hills. Leaders and followers of the Revolution were clamoring for new privileges, new rights, new morals, new creeds. They acclaimed an "Age of Reason" as a modern and marvelous discovery; they dreamed not simply of a new society, but of a new man. A multitude of clubs or parties, some political, some literary or educational, some with a pretense of philosophy, sprang up as if by magic, all believing that they must soon enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but nearly all forgetful of the fact that to enter the Kingdom one must accept the old conditions, and pay the same old price. Partly because of this strange conception of liberty, as a new thing to be established by fiat, the terrible struggle in France ended in the ignoble military despotism of Napoleon.

These two revolutions, one establishing and the other clamoring for the dignity of manhood, created a mighty stir throughout the civilized world. Following the French Revolution, most European Revolutions nations were thrown into political ferment, and the object of all their agitation, rebellion, upheaval, was to obtain a greater measure of democracy by overturning every form of class or caste government. Thrones seemed to be tottering, and in terror of their houses Continental sovereigns entered into their Holy Alliance (1815) with the unholy object of joining forces to crush democracy wherever it appeared.

**The Revolution and Literature.** The young writers of liberty-loving England felt the stir, the *sursum* of the age. Wordsworth, most sedate of men, saw in the French Revolution a glorious prophecy, and wrote with unwonted enthusiasm :

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very Heaven.

Coleridge and Southey formed their grand scheme of a Pantisocracy, a government of perfect equality, on the banks of the Susquehanna. Scott (always a Tory, and therefore distrustful of change) reflected the democratic enthusiasm in a score of romances, the chief point of which was this : that almost every character was at heart a king, and spake in right kingly fashion. Byron won his popularity largely because he was an uncompromising rebel, and appealed to young rebels who were proclaiming the necessity of a new human society. And Shelley, after himself rebelling at almost every social law of his day, wrote his *Prometheus Unbound*, which is a vague but beautiful vision of humanity redeemed in some magical way from all oppression and sorrow.

All these and other writers of the age give the impression, as we read them now, that they were gloriously expectant of a new day of liberty that was about to dawn on the world. Their romantic enthusiasm, so different from the cold formality of the age preceding, is a reflection, like a rosy sunset-glow, of the stirring scenes of revolution through which the world had just passed.

#### WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770-1850)

There is but one way to know Wordsworth, and that way leads to his nature poems. Though he lived in a revolutionary age, his life was singularly uneventful. His letters are terribly prosaic ; and his *Excursion*, in which he attempted an autobiography, has so many dull lines that few have patience to read it. Though he asserted, finely, that there is but one great

society on earth, "the noble living and the noble dead," he held no communion with the great minds of the past or of the present. He lived in his own solitary world, and his only real companion was nature. To know nature at first hand, and to reflect human thought or feeling in nature's pure presence,—this was his chief object. His field, therefore, is a small one, but in that field he is the greatest master that England has thus far produced.

**Life.** Wordsworth is as inseparably connected with the English Lake District as Burns with the Lowlands or Scott with the Border. A large part of the formative period of his life was spent out of doors amid beautiful scenery, where he felt the abounding life of nature streaming upon him in the sunshine, or booming in his ears with the steady roar of the March winds. He felt also (what sensitive spirits still feel) a living presence that met him in the loneliest wood, or spoke to him in the flowers, or preceded him over the wind-swept hills. He was one of those favored mortals who are surest of the Unseen. From school he would hurry away to his skating or bird-nesting or aimless roaming, and every new day afield was to him "One of those heavenly days that cannot die."

From the Lake Region he went to Cambridge, but found little in college life to attract or hold him. Then, stirred by the promise of the Revolution, he went to France, where his help was eagerly sought by rival parties; for in that day every traveler from America or England, whether an astute Jefferson or a lamblike Wordsworth, was supposed



WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

to be, by virtue of his country, a master politician. Wordsworth threw himself rather blindly into the Revolution, joined the Girondists **Wordsworth and the Revolution** (the ruling faction in 1792) and might have gone to the guillotine with the leaders of that party had not his friends brought him home by the simple expedient of cutting off his supply of money. Thus ended ingloriously the only adventure that ever quickened his placid life.

For a time Wordsworth mourned over the failure of his plans; but his grief turned to bitterness when the Revolution passed over into the Reign of Terror and ended in the despotism of Napoleon. His

country was now at war with France, and he followed his country, giving mild support to Burke and the Tory party. After a few uncertain years, during which he debated his calling in life, he resolved on two things: to be a poet, and to bring back to English poetry the romantic spirit and the naturalness of expression which had been displaced by the formal elegance of the age of Pope and Johnson.



WORDSWORTH'S DESK IN HAWKSHEAD  
SCHOOL

For that resolution we are indebted partly to Coleridge, who had been attracted by some of Wordsworth's early poems, and who encouraged him to write more. From the association of these two men came the famous *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), a book which marks the beginning of a new era in English poetry.

To Wordsworth's sister Dorothy we are even more indebted. It was she who soothed Wordsworth's disappointment, reminded him of the world of nature in which alone he was at home, and quietly showed him where his power lay. As he says, in *The Prelude*:

She whispered still that brightness would return;  
She, in the midst of all, preserved me still  
A poet, made me seek beneath that name,  
And that alone, my office upon earth.

The latter half of Wordsworth's life was passed in the Lake Region, at Grasmere and Rydal Mount for the most part, the continuity being broken by walking trips in Britain or on the Continent.

**Personal Traits** A very quiet, uneventful life it was, but it revealed two qualities which are of interest to Wordsworth's readers. The first was his devotion to his art; the second was his granite steadfastness. His work was at first neglected, while the poems of Scott, Byron and Tennyson in succession attained immense popularity. The critics were nearly all against him, misunderstanding his best work and ridiculing the rest. The ground of their opposition was, that his theory of the utmost simplicity in poetry was wrong; their ridicule was made easier by the fact that Wordsworth produced as much bad work as good. Moreover, he took himself very seriously, had no humor, and, as visitors like Emerson found to their disappointment, was interested chiefly in himself and his own work. For was he not engaged in the greatest of all projects, an immense poem (*The Recluse*) which should reflect the universe in the life of one man, and that man William Wordsworth? Such self-satisfaction invited attack; even Lamb, the gentlest of critics, could hardly refrain from poking fun at it:

"Wordsworth, the great poet, is coming to town; he is to have apartments in the Mansion House. He says he does not see much difficulty in writing like Shakespeare, if he had a mind to try it. It is clear that nothing is wanting but the mind."

Slowly but surely Wordsworth won recognition, not simply in being made Laureate, but in having his ideal of poetry vindicated. Poets in England and America began to follow him; the critics were silenced, if not convinced. While the popularity of Scott and Byron waned, the readers of Wordsworth increased steadily, finding him a poet not of the hour but of all time. "If a single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide," says Emerson, "the huge world will come around to him." If the reading world has not yet come around to Wordsworth, that is perhaps not the poet's fault.

**Wordsworth: his Theme and Theory.** The theory which Wordsworth and Coleridge formulated was simply this: that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful human feeling.

Its only subjects are nature and human nature ; its only object is to reflect the emotions awakened by our contemplation of the world or of humanity ; its language must be as direct and simple as possible, such language as rises unbidden to the lips whenever the heart is touched. Though some of the world's best poets have taken a different view, Wordsworth maintained steadily that poetry must deal with common subjects in the plainest language ; that it must not attempt to describe, in elegant phrases, what a poet is supposed to feel about art or some other subject selected for its poetic possibilities.

In the last contention Wordsworth was aiming at the formal school of poetry, and we may better understand him by a com-

**Natural vs. Formal Poetry** parison. Read, for example, his exquisite "Early Spring" ("I heard a thousand blended notes").

Here in twenty-four lines are more naturalness, more real feeling finely expressed, than you can find in the poems of Dryden, Johnson and Addison combined. Or take the best part of "The Campaign," which made Addison's fortune, and which was acclaimed the finest thing ever written :

So when an angel by divine command  
With rising tempests shakes a guilty land,  
(Such as of late o'er pale Britannia past)  
Calm and serene he drives the furious blast ;  
And, pleased th' Almighty's orders to perform,  
Rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm.

To know how artificial that famous simile is, read a few lines from Wordsworth's "On the Sea-Shore," which lingers in our mind like a strain of Handel's music :

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,  
The holy time is quiet as a Nun  
Breathless with adoration ; the broad sun  
Is sinking down in its tranquillity ;  
The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the Sea :  
Listen ! the mighty Being is awake,  
And doth with his eternal motion make  
A sound like thunder — everlastingly.

If such comparisons interest the student, let him read Addison's "Letter to Lord Halifax," with its Apostrophe to Liberty, which was considered sublime in its day :

O Liberty, thou goddess heavenly bright,  
Profuse of bliss, and pregnant with delight !  
Eternal pleasures in thy presence reign,  
And smiling Plenty leads thy wanton train ;  
Eased of her load, Subjection grows more light,  
And Poverty looks cheerful in thy sight ;  
Thou mak'st the gloomy face of nature gay,  
Giv'st beauty to the sun, and pleasure to the day.

Place beside that the first four lines of Wordsworth's sonnet "To Switzerland" (quoted at the head of this chapter), or a stanza from his "Ode to Duty" :

Stern Lawgiver ! yet thou dost wear  
The Godhead's most benignant grace ;  
Nor know we anything so fair  
As is the smile upon thy face :  
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,  
And fragrance in thy footing treads ;  
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,  
And the most ancient heavens, through thee,  
are fresh and strong.

To follow such a comparison is to understand Wordsworth by sympathy ; it is to understand also the difference between poetry and formal verse.

**The Poems of Wordsworth.** As the reading of literature is the main thing, the only word of criticism which remains is to direct the beginner ; and direction is especially necessary in dealing with Wordsworth, who wrote voluminously, and who lacked both the critical judgment and the sense of humor to tell him what parts of his work were inferior or ridiculous :

There's something in a flying horse,  
There's something in a huge balloon !

To be sure ; springs in the one, gas in the other ; but if there were anything more poetic in horse or balloon, Wordsworth

did not discover it. There is something also in a cuckoo clock, or even in

A household tub, one such as those  
Which women use to wash their clothes.

Such banalities are to be found in the work of a poet who could produce the exquisite sonnet "On Westminster Bridge," the finely simple "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," the stirring "Ode to Duty," the tenderly reflective "Tintern Abbey," and the magnificent "Intimations of Immortality," which Emerson (who was not a very safe judge) called "the high-water mark of poetry in the nineteenth century." These five poems may serve as the first measure of Wordsworth's genius.

A few of Wordsworth's best nature poems are: "Early Spring," "Three Years She Grew," "The Fountain," "My Poems of Heart Leaps Up," "The Tables Turned," "To a Nature Cuckoo," "To a Skylark" (the second poem, beginning, "Ethereal minstrel") and "Yarrow Revisited." The spirit of all his nature poems is reflected in "Tintern Abbey," which gives us two complementary views of nature, corresponding to Wordsworth's earlier and later experience. The first is that of the boy, roaming foot-loose over the face of nature, finding, as Coleridge said, "Rhythm in all thought, and joyance everywhere." The second is that of the man who returns to the scenes of his boyhood, finds them as beautiful as ever, but pervaded now by a spiritual quality,—"something which defies analysis, undefined and ineffable, which must be felt and perceived by the soul."

It was this spiritual view of nature, as a reflection of the Divine, which profoundly influenced Bryant, Emerson and other American writers. The essence of Wordsworth's teaching, in his nature poems, appears in the last two lines of his "Skylark," a bird that soars the more gladly to heaven because he must soon return with joy to his own nest:

Type of the wise, who soar but never roam:  
True to the kindred points of heaven and home.

Of the poems more closely associated with human life, a few of the best are: "Michael," "The Highland Reaper," "The Poems of Leech Gatherers," "Margaret" (in *The Excursion*), <sup>Humble Life</sup> "Brougham Castle," "The Happy Warrior," "Peel Castle in a Storm," "Three Years She Grew," "She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways" and "She was a Phantom of Delight." In such poems we note two significant characteristics: that Wordsworth does not seek extraordinary characters, but is content to show the hidden beauty in the lives of plain men and women; and that his heroes and heroines dwell, as he said, where "labor still preserves his rosy face." They are natural men and women, and are therefore simple and strong; the quiet light in their faces is reflected from the face of the fields. In his emphasis on natural simplicity, virtue, beauty, Wordsworth has again been, as he desired, a teacher of multitudes. His moral teaching may be summed up in three lines from *The Excursion*:

The primal duties shine aloft like stars;  
The charities that soothe and heal and bless  
Are scattered at the feet of man like flowers.

In the number and fine quality of his sonnets Wordsworth has no superior in English poetry. Simplicity, strength, deep thought, fine feeling, careful workmanship, — these qualities are present in measure more abundant than can be found elsewhere in the poet's work:

Bees that soar for bloom,  
High as the highest peak of Furness-fells,  
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells.

In these three lines from "On the Sonnet" (which should be read entire) is the explanation why Wordsworth, who was often diffuse, found joy in compressing his whole poem into fourteen lines. A few other sonnets which can be heartily recommended are: "Westminster Bridge," "The Seashore," "The World," "Venetian Republic," "To Sleep," "Toussaint L'Ouverture,"

"Afterthoughts," "To Milton" (sometimes called "London, 1802") and the farewell to Scott when he sailed in search of health, beginning, "A trouble not of clouds or weeping rain."

Not until one has learned to appreciate Wordsworth at his best will it be safe to attempt *The Prelude, or the Growth of a Poet's Mind*. Most people grow weary of this poem, which is

too long; but a few read it with pleasure for its portrayal of Wordsworth's education at the hand of Nature, or for occasional good lines which lure us on like miners in search of gold. *The Prelude*, though written at thirty-five, was not published till after Wordsworth's death, and for this reason: he had planned an immense poem, dealing with Nature, Man and Society, which he called *The Recluse*, and which he likened to a Gothic cathedral. His *Prelude* was the "ante-chapel" of this work; his miscellaneous odes, sonnets and



ST. OSWALD'S CHURCH, GRASMERE

Wordsworth's body was buried in the churchyard  
See *The Excursion*, Book V

narrative poems were to be as so many "cells and oratories"; other parts of the structure were *The Home at Grasmere* and *The Excursion*, which he may have intended as transepts, or as chapels.

This great work was left unfinished, and one may say of it, as of Spenser's *Faery Queen*, that it is better so. Like other poets of venerable years Wordsworth wrote many verses that were better left in the inkpot; and it is a pity, in dealing with

so beautiful and necessary a thing as poetry, that one should ever reach the point of saying, sadly but truthfully, "Enough is too much."

#### COLERIDGE AND SOUTHEY

The story of these two men is a commentary on the uncertainties of literary fortune. Both won greater reward and reputation than fell to the lot of Wordsworth; but while the fame of the latter poet mounts steadily with the years, the former have become, as it were, footnotes to the great contemporary with whom they were associated, under the name of "Lake Poets," for half a glorious century.

**Samuel Taylor Coleridge** (1772-1834). The tragedy *Remorse*, which Coleridge wrote, is as nothing compared with the tragedy of his own life. He was a man of superb natural gifts, of vast literary culture, to whose genius the writers of that age—Wordsworth, Hazlitt, Lamb, De Quincey, Shelley, Landor, Southey—nearly all bear witness. He might well have been a great poet, or critic, or philosopher, or teacher; but he lacked the will power to direct his gifts to any definite end. His irresolution became pitiful weakness when he began to indulge in the drug habit, which soon made a slave of him. Thereafter he impressed all who met him with a sense of loss and inexpressible sorrow.



SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

Coleridge began to read at three years of age ; at five he had gone through the Bible and the Arabian Nights ; at thirty he was perhaps the most widely read man of his generation in the fields of literature and philosophy. He was a student in a famous charity school in London when he met Charles Lamb, who records his memories of the boy and the place in his charming essay of "Christ's Hospital." At college he was one of a band of enthusiasts inspired by the French Revolution, and with Southey he formed a plan to establish in America a world-reforming Pantisocracy, or communistic settlement, where all should be brothers



THE COLERIDGE COTTAGE, NETHER STOWEY, IN SOMERSETSHIRE

give reality to a world of dreams and fantasies. Witness the two most original poems in the book, "Tintern Abbey" and "The Ancient Mariner."

During the latter part of his life Coleridge won fame by his lectures on English poetry and German philosophy, and still greater fame by his conversations, -- brilliant, heaven-scaling monologues, which brought together a company of young enthusiasts. And presently these disciples of Coleridge were spreading abroad a new idealistic philosophy, which crossed the ocean, was welcomed by Emerson and a host of young writers or reformers, and appeared in American literature as Transcendentalism.

Life of Coleridge

and equals, and where a little manual work was to be tempered by much play, poetry and culture. Europeans had queer ideas of America in those days. This beautiful plan failed, because the reformers did not have money enough to cross the ocean and stake out their Paradise.

The next important association of Coleridge was with Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy, in Somerset, where the three friends planned and published the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798. In this work Wordsworth attempted to portray the charm of common things, and Coleridge to

Others who heard the conversations were impressed in a somewhat different way. Keats met Coleridge on the road, one day, and listened dumbfounded to an ecstatic discourse on poetry, nightingales, the origin of sensation, dreams (four kinds), consciousness, creeds, ghost stories, — "he broached a thousand matters" while the poets were walking a space of two miles.

Walter Scott, meeting Coleridge at a dinner, listened with his head in a whirl to a monologue on fairies, the classics, ancient mysteries, visions, ecstasies, the psychology of poetry, the poetry of metaphysics. "Zounds!" says Scott, "I was never so bethumped with words."

Charles Lamb, hurrying to his work, encountered Coleridge and was drawn aside to a quiet garden. There the poet took Lamb by a button of his coat, closed his eyes, and began to discourse, his right hand waving to the rhythm of the flowing words. No sooner was Coleridge well started than Lamb slyly took out his penknife, cut off the button, and escaped unobserved. Some hours later, as he passed the garden on his return, Lamb heard a voice speaking most musically; he turned aside in wonder, and there stood Coleridge, his eyes closed, his left hand holding the button, his right hand waving, "still talking like an angel."

Such are the stories, true or apocryphal, of Coleridge's conversations. Their bewildering quality appears, somewhat dimmed, in his prose works, which have been finely compared with the flight of an eagle on set wings, sweeping in wide circles, balancing, soaring, mounting on the winds. But we must note this difference: that the eagle keeps his keen eye on the distant earth, and always knows just where he is; while Coleridge sees only the wonders of Cloudland, and appears to be hopelessly lost.

The chief prose works of Coleridge are his *Biographia Literaria* (a brilliant patchwork of poetry and metaphysics), *Aids to Reflection, Letters and Table Talk* (the most readable of his works), and *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare*. These all contain fine gold, but the treasure is for those doughty miners the critics rather than for readers who go to literature for recreation. Among the best of his miscellaneous poems (and Coleridge at his best has few superiors) are "Youth and Age," "Love Poems," "Hymn before Sunrise," "Ode to the Departing Year," and the pathetic "Ode to Dejection," which is a reflection of the poet's saddened but ever hopeful life.

Two other poems, highly recommended by most critics, are the fragments "Kubla Khan" and "Christabel"; but in dealing with these the reader may do well to form his own judgment. Both fragments contain beautiful lines, but as a whole they are wandering, disjointed, inconsequent,—mere sketches, they seem, of some weird dream of mystery or terror which Coleridge is trying in vain to remember.

The most popular of Coleridge's works is his imperishable "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," a wildly improbable poem of **The Ancient Mariner** icebound or tropic seas, of thirst-killed sailors, of a phantom ship sailed by a crew of ghosts,—all portrayed in the vivid, picturesque style of the old ballad. When the "Mariner" first appeared it was dismissed as a cock-and-bull story; yet somehow readers went back to it, again and again, as if fascinated. It was passed on to the next generation; and still we read it, and pass it on. For this grotesque tale differs from all others of its kind in that its lines have been quoted for over a hundred years as a reflection of some profound human experience. That is the genius of the work: it takes the most fantastic illusions and makes them appear as real as any sober journey recorded in a sailor's log book.<sup>1</sup>

At the present time our enjoyment of the "Mariner" is somewhat hampered by the critical commentaries which have fastened upon the poem, like barnacles on an old ship. It has been studied as a type of the romantic ballad, as a moral lesson, as a tract against cruelty to animals, as a model of college English. But that is no way to abuse a poet's fancy! To appreciate the "Mariner" as the author intended, one should carry it off to the hammock or orchard; there to have freedom of soul to enjoy a well-spun yarn, a gorgeous flight of imagination, a poem which illustrates Coleridge's definition of poetry

<sup>1</sup> In connection with the "Ancient Mariner" one should read the legends of "The Flying Dutchman" and "The Wandering Jew." Poe's story "A Manuscript Found in a Bottle" is based on these legends and on Coleridge's poem.

as "the bloom and the fragrance of all human knowledge, thoughts, emotions, language." It broadens one's sympathy, as well as one's horizon, to accompany this ancient sailor through scenes of terror and desolation :

O Wedding-Guest ! this soul hath been  
Alone on a wide, wide sea :  
So lonely 't was, that God himself  
Scarce seem'd there to be.

In the midst of such scenes come blessed memories of a real world, of the beauty of unappreciated things, such as the "sweet jargoning" of birds :

And now 't was like all instruments,  
Now like a lonely flute ;  
And now it is an angel's song,  
That makes the heavens be mute.

It ceased ; yet still the sails made on  
A pleasant noise till noon,  
A noise like of a hidden brook  
In the leafy month of June,  
That to the sleeping woods all night  
Singeth a quiet tune.

Whoever is not satisfied with that for its own sake, without moral or analysis, has missed the chief interest of all good poetry.

**Robert Southey.** In contrast with the irresolution of Coleridge is the steadfastness of Southey (1774-1843), a man of strong character, of enormous industry. For fifty years he worked steadily, day and half the night, turning out lyrics, ballads, epics, histories, biographies, translations, reviews,—an immense amount of stuff, filling endless volumes. Kind nature made up for Southey's small talent by giving him a great opinion of it, and he believed firmly that his work was as immortal as the *Iliad*.

With the exception of a few short poems, such as the "Battle of Blenheim," "Lodore," "The Inchcape Rock" and

“Father William” (parodied in the nonsense of *Alice in Wonderland*), the mass of Southey’s work is already forgotten. Deserving of mention, however, are his *Peninsular War* and his *Life of Nelson*, both written in a straightforward style, portraying patriotism without the usual sham, and a first-class fighting man without brag or bluster. Curious readers may also be attracted by the epics of Southey (such as *Madoc*, the story

of a Welsh prince who anticipated Columbus), which contain plenty of the marvelous adventures that give interest to the romances of Jules Verne and the yarns of Rider Haggard.

It was Southey’s habit to work by the clock, turning out chapters as another man might dig potatoes. One day, as he plodded along, a fairy must have whispered in his ear; for he suddenly produced a little story, a gem, a treasure of a story, and hid it away in a jungle of chapters in a book called *The Doctor*. Somebody soon discovered

ROBERT SOUTHEY



the treasure; indeed, one might as well try to conceal a lighted candle as to hide a good story; and now it is the most famous work to be found in Southey’s hundred volumes of prose and verse. Few professors could give you any information concerning *The Doctor*, but almost any child will tell you all about “The Three Bears.” The happy fate of this little nursery tale might indicate that the final judges of literature are not always or often the learned critics.

## THE REVOLUTIONARY POETS

The above title is often applied to Byron and Shelley, and for two reasons: because they were themselves rebellious of heart, and because they voiced the rebellion of numerous other young enthusiasts who, disappointed by the failure of the French Revolution to bring in the promised age of happiness, were ready to cry out against the existing humdrum order of society. Both poets were sadly lacking in mental or moral balance; and finding no chance in England to wage heroic warfare against political tyranny, as the French had done, they proceeded in rather headlong fashion to an attack on well-established customs in society, and especially did they strike out wildly against "the monster Public Opinion." Because the "monster" was stronger than they were, and more nearly right, their rebellion ended in tragedy.



GRETA HALL (IN THE LAKE REGION)

Where Southey lived, 1803-1839

**Life of Byron.** In the life of George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824), is so much that calls for apology or silence that one is glad to review his career in briefest outline.

Of his family, noble in name but in nothing else, the least said the better. He was born in London, but spent his childhood in Aberdeen, under the alternate care or negligence of his erratic mother. At ten he fell heir to a title, to the family seat of Newstead Abbey, and to estates yielding an income of some £1400 per year,—a large income for a poet, but as nothing to a lord accustomed to make ducks and drakes of his money. In school and college his conduct was rather wild, and his taste fantastic. For example, he kept a bulldog and a bear in his rooms, and read romances instead of books

recommended by the faculty. He tells us that he detested poetry; yet he wrote numerous poems which show plainly that he not only read but copied some of the poets.<sup>1</sup>

At twenty-one Byron entered the House of Lords, and almost immediately thereafter set sail for Lisbon and the Levant. On his **A Literary Lion** return he published the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, which made him famous. Though he affected to despise his triumph, he followed it up shrewdly by publishing *The Giaour*, *The Corsair* and *Lara*, in which the same mysterious hero of his first work

reappears, under different disguises, amid romantic surroundings. The vigor of these poems attracted many readers, and when it was whispered about that the author was recounting his own adventures, Byron became the center of literary interest. At home he was a social lion; abroad he was acclaimed the greatest of British poets. But his life tended more and more to shock the English sense of decency; and when his wife (whom he had married for her money) abruptly left him, public opinion made its power felt. Byron's popularity waned; his vanity was wounded; he left his country, vowing never to return. Also he railed against what he called British hypocrisy.

LORD BYRON  
After the portrait by T. Phillips

In Geneva he first met Shelley, admired him, was greatly helped by him, and then grossly abused his hospitality. After a scandalous career in Italy he went to help the Greeks in their fight for independence, but died of fever before he reached the battle line.

<sup>1</sup> These poems (revised and published as *Hours of Idleness*) were savagely criticized in the *Edinburgh Review*. Byron answered with his satiric *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, which ridiculed not only his Scottish critics but also Wordsworth, Scott,—in fact, most of the English poets, with the exception of Pope, whom he praised as the only poet ancient or modern who was not a barbarian.

**The Poetry of Byron.** There is one little song of Byron which serves well as the measure of his poetic talent. It is found in *Don Juan*, and it begins as follows:

'T is sweet to hear  
At midnight on the blue and moonlit deep  
The song and oar of Adria's gondolier,  
By distance mellow'd, o'er the waters sweep ;  
'T is sweet to see the evening star appear ;  
'T is sweet to listen, as the night-winds creep  
From leaf to leaf ; 't is sweet to view on high  
The rainbow, based on ocean, span the sky.

'T is sweet to hear the watch-dog's honest bark  
Bay deep-mouthed welcome as we draw near home ;  
'T is sweet to know there is an eye will mark  
Our coming, and look brighter when we come ;  
'T is sweet to be awaken'd by the lark,  
Or lulled by falling waters ; sweet the hum  
Of bees, the voice of girls, the song of birds,  
The lisp of children, and their earliest words.

That is not great poetry, and may not be compared with a sonnet of Wordsworth ; but it is good, honest sentiment expressed in such a melodious way that we like to read it, and feel better after the reading. In the next stanza, however, Byron grows commonplace and ends with :

Sweet is revenge, especially to women,  
Pillage to soldiers, prize-money to seamen.

And that is bad sentiment and worse rime, without any resemblance to poetry. The remaining stanzas are mere drivel, unworthy of the poet's talent or of the reader's patience.

It is so with a large part of Byron's work ; it often begins well, and usually has some vivid description of nature, or some gallant passage in swinging verse, which stirs us like martial music ; then the poem falls to earth like a stone, and presently appears some wretched pun or jest or scurrility. Our present remedy lies in a book of selections, in which we can enjoy the poetry without being unpleasantly reminded of the author's besetting sins of flippancy and bad taste.

Of the longer poems of Byron, which took all Europe by storm, only three or four are memorable. *Manfred* (1817) is a dramatic poem, in which the author's pride, his *Manfred* theoretic posing, his talent for rhythmic expression, are all seen at their worst or best. The mysterious hero of the poem lives in a gloomy castle under the high Alps, but he is seldom found under roof. Instead he wanders amidst storms and glaciers, holding communion with powers of darkness, forever voicing his rebellion, his boundless pride, his bottomless remorse. Nobody knows what the rebellion and the remorse are all about. Some readers may tire of the shadowy hero's egoism,



NEWSTEAD ABBEY AND BYRON OAK

but few will fail to be impressed by the vigor of the verse, or by the splendid reflection of picturesque scenes. And here and there is a lyric that seems to set itself to music :

Mont Blanc is the monarch of mountains ;  
They crowned him long ago  
On a throne of rocks, in a robe of clouds,  
With a diadem of snow.

*Cain* (1821) is another dramatic poem, reflecting the rebellion of another hero, or rather the same hero, who appears this time as the elder son of Adam. After murdering his brother, the hero takes guidance of Lucifer and explores hell ; where, instead of repentance, he finds occasion to hate almost

everything that is dear to God or man. The drama is a kind of gloomy parody of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, as *Manfred* is a parody of Goethe's *Faust*. Both dramas are interesting, aside from their poetic passages, as examples of the so-called Titan literature, to which we shall presently refer in our study of Shelley's *Prometheus*.

The most readable work of Byron is *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, a brilliant narrative poem, which reflects the impressions of another misanthropic hero in presence of the romantic scenery of the Continent. It was the publication of the first two cantos of this poem, in 1812, that made Byron the leading figure in English poetry; and these cantos are still widely read as a kind of poetic guidebook. To many readers, however, the third and fourth cantos are more sincere and more pleasurable. The most memorable parts of *Childe Harold* are the "Farewell" in the first canto, "Waterloo" in the third, and "Lake Leman," "Venice," "Rome," "The Coliseum," "The Dying Gladiator" and "The Ocean" in the fourth. When one has read these magnificent passages he has the best of which Byron was capable. We have called *Childe Harold* the most readable of Byron's works, but those who like a story will probably be more interested in *Mazeppa* and *The Prisoner of Chillon*.

One significant quality of these long poems is that they are intensely personal, voicing one man's remorse or rebellion, and



THE CASTLE OF CHILLON

perpetually repeating his "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" They are concerned with the same hero (who is Byron under **The Byronic Hero** various disguises) and they picture him as a proud, mysterious stranger, carelessly generous, fiendishly wicked, profoundly melancholy, irresistibly fascinating to women. Byron is credited with the invention of this hero, ever since called Byronic; but in truth the melodramatic outcast was a popular character in fiction long before Byron adopted him, gave him a new dress and called him *Manfred* or *Don Juan*. A score of romances (such as Mrs. Radcliffe's *The Italian* in England, and Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* in America) had used the same hero to add horror to a grotesque tale; Scott modified him somewhat, as the Templar in *Ivanhoe*, for example; and Byron made him more real by giving him the revolutionary spirit, by employing him to voice the rebellion against social customs which many young enthusiasts felt so strongly in the early part of the nineteenth century.

**Two Views of Byron** The vigor of this stage hero, his rebellious spirit, his picturesque adventures, the gaudy tinsel (mistaken for gold) in which he was dressed,—all this made a tremendous impression in that romantic age. Goethe called Byron "the prince of modern poetry, the most talented and impressive figure which the literary world has ever produced"; and this unbalanced judgment was shared by other critics on the Continent, where Byron is still regarded as one of the greatest of English poets.

Swinburne, on the other hand, can hardly find words strong enough to express his contempt for the "blare and brassiness" of Byron; but that also is an exaggeration. Though Byron is no longer a popular hero, and though his work is more rhetorical than poetical, we may still gladly acknowledge the swinging rhythm, the martial dash and vigor of his best verse. Also, remembering the Revolution, we may understand the dazzling impression which he made upon the poets of his day. When the news came from Greece that his meteoric career

was ended, the young Tennyson wept passionately and went out to carve on a stone, "Byron is dead," as if poetry had perished with him. Even the coldly critical Matthew Arnold was deeply moved to write :

When Byron's eyes were closed in death  
We bowed our head, and held our breath.  
He taught us little, but our soul  
Had *felt* him like the thunder roll.

**Life of Shelley.** The career of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) is, in comparison with that of Byron, as a will-o'-the-wisp to a meteor. Byron was of the earth earthy ; he fed upon coarse food, shady adventures, scandal, the limelight ; but Shelley

Seemed nourished upon starbeams, and the stuff  
Of rainbows and the tempest and the foam.

He was a delicate child, shy, sensitive, elflike, who wandered through the woods near his home, in Sussex, on the lookout for sprites and hobgoblins. His reading was of the wildest kind ; and when he began the study of chemistry he was forever putting together things that made horrible smells or explosions, in expectation that the genii of the *Arabian Nights* would rise from the smoke of his test tube.

At Eton the boy promptly rebelled against the brutal fagging system, then tolerated in all English schools. He was presently in hot water, and the name "Mad Shelley," which the boys gave him, followed him through life. He had been in the university (Oxford) hardly two years when his head was turned by some book of shallow philosophy, and he printed a rattle-brained tract called "The Necessity of Atheism." This got him into such trouble with the Dons that he was expelled for insubordination.

Forthwith Shelley published more tracts of a more rebellious kind. His sister Helen put them into the hands of her girl friend, Harriet Westbrook, who showed her belief in revolutionary theories by running away from school and parental discipline and coming to Shelley for "protection." These two social rebels, both in the green-apple stage (their combined age was thirty-five), were presently married ; not that either of them believed in marriage, but because they were compelled by "Anarch Custom."

After some two years of a wandering, will-o'-the-wisp life, Shelley and his wife were estranged and separated. The young poet then met

a certain William Godwin, known at that time as a novelist and revolutionary philosopher, and showed his appreciation of Godwin's radical teaching by running away with his daughter Mary, aged seventeen. The first wife, tired of liberalism, drowned herself, and Shelley was plunged into remorse at the tragedy. The right to care for his children was denied him, as an improper person, and he was practically driven out of England by force of that public opinion which he had so frequently outraged or defied.



PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Life is a good teacher, though stern in its reckoning, and in Italy life taught Shelley that the rights and beliefs of other men were no less sacred than his own. He was a strange combination of hot head and kind heart, the one filled with wild social theories, the other with compassion for humanity. He was immensely generous with his friends, and tender to the point of tears at the thought of suffering men,— not real men, such as he met in the streets (even the beggars in Italy are cheerful), but idealized men, with mysterious sorrows, whom he met in the clouds. While in England his weak head had its foolish way, and his early poems, such as

*Queen Mab*, are violent declamations. In Italy his heart had its day, and his later poems, such as *Adonais* and *Prometheus Unbound*, are rhapsodies ennobled by Shelley's love of beauty and by his unquenchable hope that a bright day of justice must soon dawn upon the world. He was drowned (1822) while sailing his boat off the Italian coast, before he had reached the age of thirty years.

**The Poetry of Shelley.** In the longer poems of Shelley there are two prominent elements, and two others less conspicuous but more important. The first element is revolt. The poet was violently opposed to the existing order of society, and

lost no opportunity to express his hatred of Tyranny, which was Shelley's name for what sober men called law and order. Feeding his spirit of revolution were numerous anarchistic theories, called the new philosophy, which had this curious quality: that they hotly denied the old faith, law, morality, as other men formulated such matters, and fervently believed any quack who appeared with a new nostrum warranted to cure all social disorders.

The second obvious element in Shelley's poetry is his love of beauty, not the common beauty of nature or humanity which Wordsworth celebrated, but a strange "supernal" beauty with no earthly quality or reality. His best lines leave a vague impression of something beautiful and lovely, but we know not what it is.

Less conspicuous in Shelley's poems are the sense of personal loss or grief which pervades them, and the exquisite melody of certain words which he used for their emotional effect rather than to convey any definite meaning. Like Byron he sang chiefly of his own feelings, his rage or despair, his sorrow or loneliness. He reflected his idea of the origin and motive of lyric poesy in the lines:

Most wretched men  
Are cradled into poetry by wrong;  
They learn in suffering what they teach in song, —

an idea which Poe adopted in its entirety, and which Heine expressed in a sentimental lyric, telling how from his great grief he made his little songs:

Aus meinen groszen Schmerzen  
Mach' ich die kleinen Lieder.

Hardly another English poet uses words so musically as Shelley (witness "The Cloud" and "The Skylark"), and here again his idea of verbal melody was carried to an extreme by Poe, in whose poetry words are used not so much to express ideas as to awaken vague emotions.

All the above-named qualities appear in *Alastor* (the Spirit of Solitude), which is less interesting as a poem than as a study of Shelley. In this poem we may skip the *Alastor* revolt, which is of no consequence, and follow the poet in his search for a supernally lovely maiden who shall satisfy his love for ideal beauty. To find her he goes, not among human habitations, but to gloomy forests, dizzy cliffs, raging torrents, tempest-blown seashore, — to every place where a maiden in her senses would not be. Such places, terrible or picturesque, are but symbols of the poet's soul in its suffering and loneliness. He does not find his maiden (and herein we read the poet's first confession that he has failed in life, that the world is too strong for him); but he sees the setting moon, and somehow that pale comforter brings him peace with death.

In *Prometheus Unbound* Shelley uses the old myth of the Titan who rebelled against the tyranny of the gods, and who *Prometheus* was punished by being chained to a rock.<sup>1</sup> In this poem Prometheus (man) is represented as being tortured by Jove (law or custom) until he is released by Demogorgon (progress or necessity); whereupon he marries Asia (love or goodness), and stars and moon break out into a happy song of redemption.

Obviously there is no reality or human interest in such a fantasy. The only pleasurable parts of the poem are its detached passages of great melody or beauty; and the chief value of the work is as a modern example of Titan literature. Many poets have at various times represented mankind in the person of a Titan, that is, a man written large, colossal in his courage or power or suffering: Æschylus in *Prometheus*, Marlowe in *Tamburlaine*, Milton in *Lucifer*, of *Paradise Lost*, Goethe in *Faust*, Byron in *Manfred*, Shelley in *Prometheus*

<sup>1</sup> The original tragedy of *Prometheus Bound* was written by Æschylus, a famous old Greek dramatist. The same poet wrote also *Prometheus Unbound*, but the latter drama has been lost. Shelley borrowed the idea of his poem from this lost drama.

*Unbound.* The Greek Titan is resigned, uncomplaining, knowing himself to be a victim of Fate, which may not be opposed ; Marlowe's Titan is bombastic and violent ; Milton's is ambitious, proud, revengeful ; Goethe's is cultured and philosophical ; Byron's is gloomy, rebellious, theatrical. So all these poets portray each his own bent of mind, and something also of the temper of the age, in the character of his Titan. The significance of Shelley's poem is in this : that his Titan is patient and hopeful, trusting in the spirit of Love to redeem mankind from all evil. Herein Shelley is far removed from the caviling temper of his fellow rebel Byron. He celebrates a golden age not of the past but of the future, when the dream of justice inspired by the French Revolution shall have become a glorious reality.

These longer poems of Shelley are read by the few ; they are too vague, with too little meaning or message, for ordinary readers who like to understand as well as to enjoy poetry. To such readers the only interesting works of Shelley are a few shorter poems : "The Cloud," "To a Skylark," "Ode to the West Wind," "Indian Serenade," "A Lament," "When the Lamp is Lighted" and some parts of *Adonais* (a beautiful elegy in memory of Keats), such as the passage beginning, "Go thou to Rome." For splendor of imagination and for melody of expression these poems have few peers and no superiors in English literature. To read them is to discover that Shelley was at times so sensitive, so responsive to every harmony of nature, that he seemed like the poet of *Alastor*,

A fragile lute, on whose harmonious strings  
The breath of Heaven did wander.

The breath of heaven is constant, but lutes and strings are variable matters of human arrangement. When Shelley's lute was tuned to nature it brought forth aerial melody ; when he strained its strings to voice some social rebellion or anarchistic theory it produced wild discord.

## JOHN KEATS (1795-1821)

A thing of beauty is a joy forever:  
Its loveliness increases; it will never  
Pass into nothingness, but still will keep  
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep  
Full of sweet dreams and health and quiet breathing.

The above lines, from *Endymion*, reflect the ideal of the young singer whom we rank with the best poets of the nineteenth century. Unlike other romanticists of that day, he seems to have lived for poetry alone and to have loved it for its own sake, as we love the first spring flowers. His work was shamefully treated by reviewers; it was neglected by the public; but still he wrote, trying to make each line perfect, in the spirit of those medieval workmen who put their hearts into a carving that would rest on some lofty spire far above the eyes of men. To reverence beauty wherever he found it, and then in gratitude to produce a new work of beauty which should live forever,—that was Keats's only aim. It is the more wonderful in view of his humble origin, his painful experience, his tragic end.

**Life.** Only twenty-five years of life, which included seven years of uncongenial tasks, and three of writing, and three of wandering in search of health,—that sums up the story of Keats. He was born in London; he was the son of a hostler; his home was over the stable; his playground was the dirty street. The family prospered, moved to a better locality, and the children were sent to a good school. Then the parents died, and at fifteen Keats was bound out to a surgeon and apothecary. For four years he worked as an apprentice, and for three years more in a hospital; then, for his heart was never in the work, he laid aside his surgeon's kit, resolving never to touch it again.

Since childhood he had been a reader, a dreamer, but not till a volume of Spenser's *Faery Queen* was put into his hands did he turn with intense eagerness to poetry. The influence of that volume is seen in the somewhat monotonous sweetness of his early work. Next he explored the classics (he had read Virgil in the original, but he

knew no Greek), and the joy he found in Chapman's translation of Homer is reflected in a noble sonnet. From that time on he was influenced by two ideals which he found in Greek and medieval literature, the one with its emphasis on form, the other with its rich and varied coloring.

During the next three years Keats published three small volumes, his entire life's work. These were brutally criticized by literary magazines; they met with ridicule at the hands of Byron, with indifference on the part of Scott and Wordsworth. The pathetic legend that the poet's life was shortened by this abuse is still repeated, but there is little truth in it. Keats held manfully to his course, having more weighty things than criticism to think about. He was conscious that his time was short; he was in love with his Fannie Brawne, but separated from her by illness and poverty; and, like the American poet Lanier, he faced death across the table as he wrote. To throw off the consumption which had fastened upon him he tried to live in the open, making walking trips in the Lake Region; but he met with rough fare and returned from each trip weaker than before. He turned at last to Italy, dreading the voyage and what lay beyond. Night fell as the ship put to sea; the evening star shone clear through the storm clouds, and Keats sent his farewell to life and love and poetry in the sonnet beginning:

Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art.

He died soon after his arrival in Rome, in 1821. Shelley, who had hailed Keats as a genius, and who had sent a generous invitation to come and share his home, commemorated the poet's death and the



JOHN KEATS

world's loss in *Adonais*, which ranks with Milton's *Lycidas*, Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and Emerson's *Threnody* among the great elegiac poems of our literature.

**The Work of Keats.** The first small volume of Keats (*Poems*, 1817) seems now like an experiment. The part of that experiment which we cherish above all others is the sonnet "On Chapman's Homer," which should be read entire for its note of joy and for its fine expression of the influence of classic poetry. The second volume, *Endymion*, may be regarded as a promise. There is little reality in the rambling poem which gives title to the volume (the story of a shepherd beloved of a moon-goddess), but the bold imagery of the work, its Spenserian melody, its passages of rare beauty,—all these speak of a true poet who has not yet quite found himself or his subject. A third volume, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes and Other Poems* (1820), is in every sense a fulfillment, for it contains a large proportion of excellent poetry, fresh, vital, melodious, which improves with years, and which carries on its face the stamp of permanency.

The contents of this little volume may be arranged, not very accurately, in three classes. In the first are certain **His Best Poems** poems that by their perfection of form show the Greek or classic spirit. Best known of these poems are the fragment "Hyperion," with its Milton-like nobility of style, and "Lamia," which is the story of an enchantress whom love transforms into a beautiful woman, but who quickly vanishes because of her lover's too great curiosity,—a parable, perhaps, of the futility of science and philosophy, as Keats regarded them.

Of the poems of the second class, which reflect old medieval legends, "The Pot of Basil," "The Eve of St. Agnes" and "La Belle Dame sans Merci" are praised by poets and critics alike. "St. Agnes," which reflects a vague longing rather than a story, is the best known; but "La Belle Dame" may appeal to some readers as the most moving of Keats's poems.

The essence of all old metrical romances is preserved in a few lines, which have an added personal interest from the fact that they may reveal something of the poet's sad love story.

In the third class are a few sonnets and miscellaneous poems, all permeated by the sense of beauty, showing in every line the genius of Keats and his exquisite workmanship. The sonnets "On the Sea," "When I have Fears," "On the Grasshopper and Cricket" and "To Sleep"; the fragment beginning "In a drear-nighted December"; the marvelous odes "On a Grecian Urn," "To a Nightingale" and "To Autumn," in which he combines the simplicity of the old classics with the romance and magic of medieval writers,—there are no works in English of a similar kind that make stronger appeal to our ideal of poetry and of verbal melody. Into the three stanzas of "Autumn," for example, Keats has compressed the vague feelings of beauty, of melancholy, of immortal aspiration, which come to sensitive souls in the "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness." It may be compared, or rather contrasted, with another poem on the same subject which voices the despair in the heart of the French poet Verlaine, who hears "the sobbing of the violins of autumn":

Les sanglots longs  
Des violons  
De l'automne  
Blessent mon cœur  
D'une langueur  
Monotone.

**Keats: an Essay of Criticism.** Beyond recommending a few of his poems for their beauty, there is really so little to be said of Keats that critics are at their wit's end to express their appreciation. So we read of Keats's "pure æstheticism," his "copious perfection," his "idyllic visualization," his "haunting poignancy of feeling," his "subtle felicities of diction," his "tone color," and more to the same effect. Such criticisms are doubtless well meant, but they are harder to follow than

Keats's "Endymion"; and that is no short or easy road of poesy. Perhaps by trying more familiar ways we may better understand Keats, why he appeals so strongly to poets, and why he is so seldom read by other people.

The first characteristic of the man was his love for every beautiful thing he saw or heard. Sometimes the object which

**The Sense of Beauty** fascinated him was the widespread sea or a solitary star; sometimes it was the work of man, the product of his heart and brain attuned, such as a passage from Homer, a legend of the Middle Ages, a vase of pure lines amid the rubbish of a museum, like a bird call or the scent of violets in a city street. Whatever the object that aroused his sense of beauty, he turned aside to stay with it a while, as on the byways of Europe you will sometimes see a man lay down his burden and bare his head before a shrine that beckons him to pray. With this reverence for beauty Keats had other and rarer qualities: the power to express what he felt, the imagination which gave him beautiful figures, and the taste which enabled him to choose the finest words, the most melodious phrases, wherewith to reflect his thought or mood or emotion.

Such was the power of Keats, to be simple and reverent in the presence of beauty, and to give his feeling poetic or imaginative expression. In respect of such power he probably had no peer in English literature. His limitations were two-fold: he looked too exclusively on the physical side of beauty, and he lived too far removed from the common, wholesome life of men.

To illustrate our criticism: that man whom we saw by the wayside shrine acknowledged the presence of some spiritual

**Sense and Soul** beauty and truth, the beauty of holiness, the ineffable loveliness of God. So the man who trains a child, or gives thanks for a friend, or remembers his mother, is always at heart a lover of beauty,—the moral beauty of character, of comradeship, of self-sacrifice. But the poetry of Keats deals largely with outward matters, with form, color,

melody, odors, with what is called "sensuous" beauty because it delights our human senses. Such beauty is good, but it is not supreme. Moreover, the artist who would appeal widely to men must by sympathy understand their whole life, their mirth as well as their sorrow, their days of labor, their hours of play, their moments of worship. But Keats, living apart with his ideal of beauty, like a hermit in his cell, was able to understand and to voice only one of the profound interests of humanity. For this reason, and because of the deep note of sadness which sounds through all his work like the monotone of the sea, his exquisite poems have never had any general appreciation. Like Spenser, who was his first master, he is a poet's poet.

#### MINOR POETS OF ROMANTICISM

In the early nineteenth century the Literary Annuals appeared, took root and flourished mightily in England and America. These annuals (such a vigorous crop should have been called hardy annuals) were collections of contemporary prose or verse that appeared once a year under such sentimental names as "Friendship's Offering," "The Token" and "The Garland." That they were sold in large numbers on both sides of the Atlantic speaks of the growing popular interest in literature. Moreover, they served an excellent purpose at a time when books and libraries were less accessible than they are now. They satisfied the need of ordinary readers for poetry and romance; they often made known to the world a talented author, who found in public approval that sweet encouragement which critics denied him; they made it unlikely that henceforth "some mute, inglorious Milton" should remain either mute or inglorious; and they not only preserved the best work of minor poets but, what is much better, they gave it a wide reading.

Thanks to such collections, from which every newspaper filled its Poet's Corner, good poems which else might have

hid their little light under a bushel—Campbell's "Hohenlinden," Mrs. Hemans' "Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers," Hunt's "Abou ben Adhem," Hood's "The Song of the Shirt," and many others—are now as widely known as are the best works of Wordsworth or Byron.

We can name only a few poets of the age, leaving the reader to form acquaintance with their songs in an anthology. Especially worthy of remembrance are: Thomas Campbell,

who greatly influenced the American poets Halleck and Drake; Thomas Moore, whose *Irish Melodies* have an attractive singing quality; James Hogg (The Ettrick Shepherd); John Keble, author of *The Christian Year*; Thomas Hood; Felicia Hemans; and Leigh Hunt, whose encouragement of Keats is as memorable as his "Abou ben Adhem" or "The Glove and the Lions." There are other poets of equal rank with those we have ventured to name, and their melodious quality is such that a modern critic has spoken of them, in terms com-



LEIGH HUNT

monly applied to the Elizabethans, as "a nest of singing birds"; which would be an excellent figure if we could forget the fact that birds in a nest never sing. Their work is perhaps less imaginative (and certainly less fantastic) than that of Elizabethan singers, but it comes nearer to present life and reality.

One of the least known of these minor poets, Thomas Beddoes, was gifted in a way to remind us of the strange genius of Blake. He wrote not much, his life being too broken and disappointed; but running through his scanty verse is a

thread of the pure gold of poetry. In a single stanza of his "Dream Pedlary" he has reflected the spirit of the whole romantic movement :

If there were dreams to sell,  
    What would you buy?  
Some cost a passing bell,  
    Some a light sigh  
That shakes from Life's fresh crown  
Only a rose-leaf down.  
If there were dreams to sell,  
    Merry and sad to tell,  
And the crier rang the bell,  
    What would you buy?

### THE WORK OF WALTER SCOTT (1771-1832)

To read Scott is to read Scotland. Of no other modern author can it so freely be said that he gave to literature a whole country, its scenery, its people, its history and traditions, its ideals of faith and courage and loyalty.

That is a large achievement, but that is not all. It was Scott, more than any other author, who brought poetry and romance home to ordinary readers ; and with romance came pleasure, wholesome and refreshing as a drink from a living spring. When he began to write, the novel was in a sad state,—sentimental, sensational, fantastic, devoted to what Charles Lamb described as wildly improbable events and to characters that belong neither to this world nor to any other conceivable one. When his work was done, the novel had been raised to its present position as the most powerful literary influence that bears upon the human mind. Among novelists, therefore, Scott deserves his title of "the first of the modern race of giants."

**Life.** To his family, descendants of the old Borderers, Scott owed that intensely patriotic quality which glows in all his work. He is said to have borne strong resemblance to his grandfather, "Old Bardie Scott," an unbending clansman who vowed never to cut his beard till a Stuart prince came back to the throne. The clansmen were now

citizens of the Empire, but their loyalty to hereditary chiefs is reflected in Scott's reverence for everything pertaining to rank or royalty.

He was born (1771) in Edinburgh, but his early associations were all of the open country. Some illness had left him lame of foot, and **First Impressions** with the hope of a cure he was sent to relatives at Sandy Knowe. There in the heart of the Border he spent his days on the hills with the shepherds, listening to Scottish legends. At bedtime his grandmother told him tales of the clans; and when he could read for himself he learned by heart Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*. So the scenes which he loved because of their wild beauty became sacred because of their historical association. Even in that early day his heart had framed the sentiment which found expression in his *Lay of the Last Minstrel*:

Breathes there the man with soul so dead,  
Who never to himself hath said:  
    This is my own, my native land?

**Work and Play** At school, and at college at Edinburgh, the boy's heart was never in his books, unless perchance they contained something of the tradition of Scotland. After college he worked in his father's law office, became an advocate, and for twenty years followed the law. His vacations were spent "making raids," as he said, into the Highlands, adding to his enormous store of old tales and ballads. A companion on one of these trips gives us a picture of the man:

"Eh me, sic an endless fund o' humour and drollery as he had wi' him! Never ten yards but we were either laughing or roaring and singing. Whenever we stopped, how brawlie he suited himsel' to everybody! He aye did as the lave did; never made himsel' the great man, or took ony airs in the company."

This boyish delight in roaming, in new scenes, in new people met frankly under the open sky, is characteristic of Scott's poems and novels, which never move freely until they are out of doors. The vigor of these works may be partially accounted for by the fact that Scott was a hard worker and a hearty player,—a capital combination.

He was past thirty when he began to write.<sup>1</sup> By that time he had been appointed Clerk of Sessions, and also Sheriff of Selkirkshire

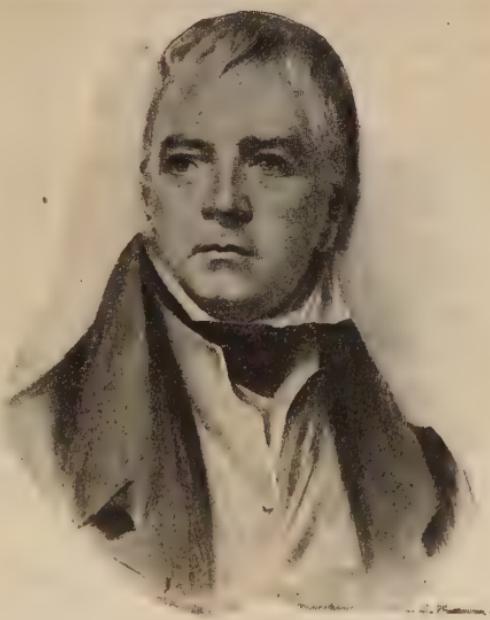
<sup>1</sup> This refers to original composition. In 1796 Scott published some translations of German romantic ballads, and in 1802 his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. The latter was a collection of old ballads, to some of which Scott gave a more modern form.

(he took that hangman's job, and kept it even after he had won fame, just for the money there was in it); and these offices, together with his wife's dowry, provided a comfortable income. When His Poems his first poem, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), met with immense success he gladly gave up the law, and wrote *Marmion* (1808) and *The Lady of the Lake* (1810). These increased his good fortune; but his later poems were of inferior quality, and met with a cool reception. Meanwhile Byron had appeared to dazzle the reading public. Scott recognized the greater poetic genius of the author of *Childe Harold*, and sought another field where he was safe from all rivals.

First Romances Rummaging in a cabinet one day after some fishing tackle, he found a manuscript long neglected and forgotten. Instead of going fishing Scott read his manuscript, was fascinated by it, and presently began to write in headlong fashion. In three weeks he added sixty-five chapters to his old romance, and published it as *Waverley* (1814) without signing his name. Then he went away on another "raid"

to the Highlands. When he returned, at the end of the summer, he learned that his book had made a tremendous sensation, and that Fame, hat in hand, had been waiting at his door for some weeks.

In the next ten years Scott won his name of "the Wizard of the North," for it seemed that only magic could produce stories of such quality in such numbers: *Guy Mannering*, *Rob Roy*, *Old Mortality*, *Redgauntlet*, *Heart of Midlothian*, portraying the deathless romance of Scotland; and *Ivanhoe*, *Kenilworth*, *The Talisman* and other novels which changed dull history to a drama of fascinating characters. Not only England but the Continent hailed this magnificent work with



WALTER SCOTT

delight. Money and fame poured in upon the author. Fortune appeared for once "with both hands full." Then the crash came.

To understand the calamity one must remember that Scott regarded literature not as an art but as a profitable business; that he aimed to be not a great writer but a lord of high degree. He had been made a baronet, and was childishly proud of the title; his work and his vast earnings were devoted to the dream of a feudal house which should endure through the centuries and look back to Sir Walter as its noble founder. While living modestly on his income at Ashiestiel he had used the earnings of his poems to buy a rough farm at Clarty Hole, on the Tweed, and had changed its unromantic name to Abbotsford.



ABBOTSFORD

More land was rapidly added and "improved" to make a lordly estate; then came the building of a castle, where Scott entertained lavishly, as lavishly as any laird or chieftain of the olden time, offering to all visitors "the honors of Scotland."

Enormous sums were spent on this bubble, and still more money was needed. To increase his income Scott went into secret partnership with his publishers, indulged in speculative ventures, ran the firm upon the shoals, drew large sums in advance of his earnings. Suddenly came a business panic; the publishing firm failed miserably; and at fifty-five Scott, having too much honest pride to take advantage of the bankruptcy laws, found himself facing a debt of more than a hundred thousand pounds.

His last years were spent in an heroic struggle to retrieve his lost fortunes. He wrote more novels, but without much zest or inspiration; His Last Years he undertook other works, such as the voluminous *Life of Napoleon*, for which he was hardly fitted, but which brought him money in large measure. In four years he had repaid the greater part of his debt, but mind and body were breaking under the strain. When the end came, in 1832, he had literally worked himself to death. The murmur of the Tweed over its shallows, music that he had loved since childhood, was the last earthly sound of which he was conscious. The house of Abbotsford, for which he had planned and toiled, went into strange hands, and the noble family which he had hoped to found died out within a few years. Only his work remains, and that endures the wear of time and the tooth of criticism.

**The Poems of Scott.** Three good poems of Scott are *Marmion*, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *The Lady of the Lake*; three others, not so good, are *Rokeby*, *Vision of Don Roderick* and *Lord of the Isles*. Among these *The Lady of the Lake* is such a favorite that, if one were to question the tourists who annually visit the Trossachs, a surprisingly large number of them would probably confess that they were led not so much by love of natural beauty as by desire to visit "Fair Ellen's Isle" and other scenes which Scott has immortalized in verse.

We may as well admit frankly that even the best of these poems is not first-class; that it shows careless workmanship, and is lacking in the finer elements of beauty and imagination. But Scott did not aim to create a work of beauty; his purpose was to tell a good story, and in that he succeeded. His *Lady of the Lake*, for example, has at least two virtues: it holds the reader's attention; and it fulfills the first law of poetry, which is to give pleasure.

Another charm of the poems, for young readers especially, is that they are simple, vigorous, easily understood. Their Quality of the Poems rapid action and flying verse show hardly a trace of conscious effort. Reading them is like sweeping downstream with a good current, no labor required save for steering, and attention free for what awaits us around the next

bend. When the bend is passed, Scott has always something new and interesting: charming scenery, heroic adventure, picturesque incidents (such as the flight of the Fiery Cross to summon the clans), interesting fragments of folklore, and occasionally a ballad like "Lochinvar," or a song like "Bonnie Dundee," which stays with us as a happy memory long after the poem is forgotten.

A secondary reason for the success of these poems was that they satisfied a fashion, very popular in Scott's day, which we have not yet outgrown. That fashion was to attribute chivalrous virtues to outlaws and other merry men, who in their own day and generation were imprisoned or hanged, and who deserved their fate. Robin Hood's gang, for example, or the Raiders of the Border, were in fact a tough lot of thieves and cutthroats; but when they appeared in romantic literature they must of course appeal to ladies; so Scott made them fine, dashing, manly fellows, sacrificing to the fashion of the hour the truth of history and humanity. As Andrew Lang says:

"In their own days the Border Riders were regarded as public nuisances by statesmen, who attempted to educate them by means of the gibbet. But now they were the delight of fine ladies, contending who should be most extravagant in encomium. A blessing on such fine ladies, who know what is good when they see it!"<sup>1</sup>

**Scott's Novels.** To appreciate the value of Scott's work one should read some of the novels that were fashionable in his day,—silly, sentimental novels, portraying the "sensibilities" of imaginary ladies.<sup>2</sup> That Scott was influenced by this inane fashion appears plainly in some of his characters, his fine ladies especially, who pose and sentimentalize till we are mortally weary of them; but this influence passed when he discovered his real power, which was to portray men and women

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Nicoll and Seccombe, *A History of English Literature*, Vol. III, p. 957.

<sup>2</sup> In America, Cooper's first romance, *Precaution* (1820), was of this artificial type. After Scott's outdoor romances appeared, Cooper discovered his talent, and wrote *The Spy* and the Leather-Stocking tales. Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen began to improve or naturalize the English novel before Scott attempted it.

in vigorous action. *Waverley*, *Rob Roy*, *Ivanhoe*, *Redgauntlet*, — such stories of brave adventure were like the winds of the North, bringing to novel-readers the tang of the sea and the earth and the heather. They braced their readers for life, made them feel their kinship with nature and humanity. Incidentally, they announced that two new types of fiction, the outdoor romance and the historical novel, had appeared with power to influence the work of Cooper, Thackeray, Dickens and a host of minor novelists.

The most convenient way of dealing with Scott's works is to

Groups of Stories arrange them in three groups. In the first are the novels of Scotland: *Waverley*, dealing with the loyalty of the clans to the Pretender; *Old Mortality*, with the faith and struggles of the Covenanters; *Redgauntlet*, with the plots of the Jacobites; *The Abbot* and *The Monastery*, with the traditions concerning Mary Queen of Scots; *Guy Mannering*, *The Antiquary* and *The Heart of Midlothian*, with private life and humble Scottish characters.

In the second group are the novels which reveal the romance of English history: *Ivanhoe*, deal-

ing with Saxon and Norman in the stormy days when Richard Lionheart returned to his kingdom; *Kenilworth*, with the intrigues of Elizabeth's Court; *The Fortunes of Nigel*, with London life in the days of Charles First; *Woodstock*, with Cromwell's iron age; *Peveril of the Peak*, with the conflict between Puritan and Cavalier during the Restoration period.

In the third group are the novels which take us to foreign lands: *Quentin Durward*, showing us the French court as dominated by the cunning of Louis Eleventh, and *The Talisman*, dealing with the Third Crusade.

In the above list we have named not all but only the best of Scott's novels. They differ superficially, in scenes or incidents; they are all alike in motive, which is to tell a tale of adventure that shall be true to human nature, no matter what liberties it may take with the facts of history.



THE GREAT WINDOW (MELROSE ABBEY)

**Quality of the Novels** In all these novels the faults are almost as numerous as the virtues ; but while the faults appear small, having little influence on the final result, the virtues are big, manly, wholesome, — such virtues as only the greatest writers of fiction possess. Probably all Scott's faults spring from one fundamental weakness : he never had a high ideal of his own art. He wrote to make money, and was inclined to regard his day's labor as "so much scribbling." Hence his style is frequently slovenly, lacking vigor and concentration ; his characters talk too much, apparently to fill space ; he caters to the romantic fashion (and at the same time indulges his Tory prejudice) by enlarging on the somewhat imaginary virtues of knights, nobles, feudal or royal institutions, and so presents a one-sided view of history.

On the other hand, Scott strove to be true to the great movements of history, and to the moral forces which, in the end, prevail in all human activity. His sympathies were broad ; he mingled in comradeship with all classes of society, saw the best in each ; and from his observation and sympathy came an enormous number of characters, high or low, good or bad, grave or ridiculous, but nearly all natural and human, because drawn from life and experience.

**Scene and Incident** Another of Scott's literary virtues is his love of wild nature, which led him to depict many grand or gloomy scenes, partly for their own sake, but largely because they formed a fitting background for human action. Thus, *The Talisman* opens with a pen picture of a solitary Crusader moving across a sun-scorched desert towards a distant island of green. Every line in that description points to action, to the rush of a horseman from the oasis, to the fierce trial of arms before the enemies speak truce and drink together from the same spring. Many another of Scott's descriptions of wild nature is followed by some gallant adventure, which we enjoy the more because we imagine that adventures ought to occur (though they seldom do) amid romantic surroundings.

**What to Read.** At least one novel in each group should be read; but if it be asked, Which one? the answer is as much a matter of taste as of judgment. Of the novels dealing with Scottish life, *Waverley*, which was Scott's first attempt, is still an excellent measure of his story-telling genius; but there is more adventurous interest in *Old Mortality* or *Rob Roy*; and in *The Heart of Midlothian* (regarded by many as the finest of Scott's works) one feels closer to nature and human nature, and especially to the heart of Scotland. *Ivanhoe* is perhaps the best of the romances of English history; and of stories dealing with adventure in strange lands, *The Talisman* will probably appeal strongest to young readers, and *Quentin Durward* to their elders. To these may be added *The Antiquary*, which is a good story, and which has an element of personal interest in that it gives us glimpses of Scott himself, surrounded by old armor, old legends, old costumes,—mute testimonies to the dreams and deeds of yesterday's men and women.

Such novels should be read once for the story, as Scott intended; and then, if one should grow weary of modern-problem novels, they may be read again for their wholesome, bracing atmosphere, for their tenderness and wisdom, for their wide horizons, for their joy of climbing to heights where we look out upon a glorious Present, and a yet more glorious Past that is not dead but living.



SCOTT'S TOMB IN DRYBURGH ABBEY

## OTHER FICTION WRITERS

Of the work of Walter Scott we have already spoken. When such a genius appears, dominating his age, we think of him as a great inventor, and so he was; but like most other inventors his trail had been blazed, his way prepared by others who had gone before him. His first romance, *Waverley*, shows the influence of earlier historical romances, such as Jane Porter's



MRS. HANNAH MORE

*Thaddeus of Warsaw* and *Scottish Chiefs*; in his later work he acknowledged his indebtedness to Maria Edgeworth, whose *Castle Rackrent* had aroused enthusiasm at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In brief, the romantic movement greatly encouraged fiction writing, and Scott did excellently what many others were doing well.

Two things are noticeable as we review the fiction of this period: the first, that nearly all the successful writers were women;<sup>1</sup> the second, that of these writers only one, the

most neglected by her own generation, holds a secure place in the hearts of present-day readers. If it be asked why Jane Austen's works endure while others are forgotten, the answer is that almost any trained writer can produce a modern romance, but it takes a genius to write a novel.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The list includes: Fanny Burney, Ann Radcliffe, Jane Porter, Maria Edgeworth, Susan Ferrier, Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan), Mary Brunton, Hannah More, Mary Russell Mitford,—all of whom were famous in their day, and each of whom produced at least one "best seller."

<sup>2</sup> The difference between the modern romance and the novel is evident in the works of Scott and Miss Austen. Scott takes an unusual subject; he calls up kings, nobles,

**Jane Austen.** The rare genius of Miss Austen (1775-1817) was as a forest flower during her lifetime. While Fanny Burney, Jane Porter and Maria Edgeworth were widely acclaimed, this little woman remained almost unknown, following no school of fiction, writing for her own pleasure, and destroying whatever did not satisfy her own sense of fitness. If she had any theory of fiction, it was simply this: to use no incident but such as had occurred before her eyes, to describe no scene that was not familiar, and to portray only such characters as she knew intimately, their speech, dress, manner, and the motives that governed their action. If unconsciously she followed any rule of expression, it was that of Cowper, who said that to touch and retouch is the secret of almost all good writing. To her theory and rule she added personal charm, intelligence, wit, genius of a high order. Neglected by her own generation, she has now an ever-widening circle of readers, and is ranked by critics among the five or six greatest writers of English fiction.

Jane Austen's life was short and extremely placid. She was born (1775) in a little Hampshire village; she spent her entire life in one country parish or another, varying the scene by an occasional summer at the watering-place of Bath, which was not very exciting. Her father was an easy-going clergyman who read Pope, avoided politics, and left preaching to his curate. She was one of a large family of children, who were brought up to regard elegance of manner as a cardinal virtue, and vulgarity of any kind as the epitome of the seven deadly sins. Her two brothers entered the navy; hence the flutter in her books whenever a naval officer comes on a furlough to his native village. She spent her life in homely, pleasant duties, and did her writing while the chatter of family life went on around her. Her only characters were visitors who came to the rectory, or who gathered around the tea-table in a neighbor's

chieftains, clansmen, robber barons,—a host of picturesque characters; he uses his imagination freely, and makes a story for the story's sake. Miss Austen takes an ordinary country village, observes its people as through a microscope, and portrays them to the life. She is not interested in making a thrilling story, but in showing us men and women as they are; and our interest is held by the verity of her portrayal. (For a different distinction between romance and novel, see p. 188.)

house. They were absolutely unconscious of the keen scrutiny to which they were subjected ; no one whispered to them, "A chiel's amang ye, takin' notes" ; and so they had no suspicion that they were being transferred into books.

The first three of Miss Austen's novels were written at Steventon, among her innocent subjects, but her precious manuscripts went begging in vain for a publisher.<sup>1</sup> The last three, reflecting as in a glass the manners of another parish, were written at Chawton, near Winchester. Then the good work suddenly began to flag. The same disease that, a little later, was to call halt to Keats's poetry of beauty now made an end of Miss Austen's portrayal of everyday life. When she died (1817) she was only forty-two years old, and her heart was still that of a young girl. A stained-glass window in beautiful old Winchester Cathedral speaks eloquently of her life and work.

If we must recommend one of Miss Austen's novels, perhaps *Pride and Prejudice* is the most typical ; but there is very little to justify this choice when the alternative is **Novels and Characters** *Northanger Abbey*, or *Emma*, or *Sense and Sensibility*, or *Persuasion*, or *Mansfield Park*. All are good ; the most definite stricture that one can safely make is that *Mansfield Park* is not so good as the others. Four of the novels are confined to country parishes ; but in *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* the horizon is broadened to include a watering place, whither genteel folk went "to take the air."

The characters of all these novels are : first, the members of five or six families, with their relatives, who try to escape individual boredom by gregariousness ; and second, more of the same kind assembled at a local fair or sociable. Here you meet a dull country squire or two, a feeble-minded baronet, a curate laboriously upholding the burden of his dignity, a doctor trying to hide his emptiness of mind by looking occupied, an uncomfortable male person in tow of his wife, maiden aunts, fond mammas with their awkward daughters, chatterboxes, poor

<sup>1</sup> *Northanger Abbey*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* were written between 1796 and 1799, when Jane Austen had just passed her twenty-first year. Her first novel was bought by a publisher who neglected to print it. The second could not be sold till after the third was published, in 1811.

relations, spoiled children,—a characteristic gathering. All these, except the spoiled children, talk with perfect propriety about the weather. If in the course of a long day anything witty is said, it is an accident, a phenomenon; conversation halts, and everybody looks at the speaker as if he must have had "a rush of brains to the head."

Such is Jane Austen's little field, an eddy of life revolving endlessly around small parish interests. Her subjects are not even the whole parish, but only "the quality," whom the favored ones may meet at Mrs. B's afternoon at home. They read proper novels, knit wristlets, discuss fevers and their remedies, raise their eyebrows at gossip, connive at matrimony, and take tea. The workers of the world enter not here; neither do men of ideas, nor social rebels, nor the wicked, nor the happily unworthy poor; and the parish is blessed in having no reformers.

In this barren field, hopeless to romancers like Scott, there never was such another explorer as Jane Austen. Her demure observation is marvelously keen; sometimes it is mischievous, or even a bit malicious, but always sparkling with wit or running over with good humor. Almost alone in that romantic age she had no story to tell, and needed none. She had never met any heroes or heroines. Plots, adventures, villains, persecuted innocence, skeletons in closets,—all the ordinary machinery of fiction seemed to her absurd and unnecessary. She was content to portray the life that she knew best, and found it so interesting that, a century later, we share her enthusiasm. And that is the genius of Miss Austen, to interest us not by a romantic story but by the truth of her observation and by the fidelity of her portrayal of human nature, especially of feminine nature.

There is one more thing to note in connection with Miss Austen's work; namely, her wholesome influence on the English novel. In *Northanger Abbey* and in *Sense and Sensibility* she satirizes the popular romances of the period, with their

Byronic heroes, melodramatic horrors and perpetual harping on some pale heroine's sensibilities. Her satire is perhaps the best that has been written on the subject, so delicate, so flashing, so keen, that a critic compares it to the exploit of Saladin (in *The Talisman*) who could not with his sword hack through an iron mace, as Richard did, but who accomplished the more difficult feat of slicing a gossamer veil as it floated in the air.

Influence on English Fiction

Such satire was not lost; yet it was Miss Austen's example rather than her precept which put to shame the sentimental romances of her day, and which influenced subsequent English fiction in the direction of truth and naturalness. Young people still prefer romance and adventure as portrayed by Scott and his followers, and that is as it should be; but an increasingly large number of mature readers (especially those who are interested in human nature) find a greater charm in the novel of characters and manners, as exemplified by Jane Austen.

### THE CRITICS AND ESSAYISTS

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century (or from Shakespeare to Wordsworth) England was preparing a great literature; and then appeared writers whose business or pleasure it was to appreciate that literature, to point out its virtues or its defects, to explain by what principle this or that work was permanent, and to share their enjoyment of good prose and poetry with others,—in a word, the critics.

In the list of such writers, who give us literature at second hand, the names of Leigh Hunt, William Hazlitt, Walter Savage Landor, Charles Lamb and Thomas De Quincey are written large. The two last-named are selected for special study, not because of their superior critical ability (for Hazlitt was probably a better critic than either), but because of a few essays in which these men left us an appreciation of life, as they saw it for themselves at first hand.

**Charles Lamb** (1775-1834). There is a little book called *Essays of Elia* which stands out from all other prose works of the age. If we examine this book to discover the source of its charm, we find it pervaded by a winsome "human" quality which makes us want to know the man who wrote it. In this respect Charles Lamb differs from certain of his contemporaries. Wordsworth was too solitary, Coleridge and De Quincey too unbalanced, Shelley too visionary and Keats too aloof to awaken a feeling of personal allegiance; but the essays of Lamb reveal two qualities which, like fine gold, are current among readers of all ages. These are sympathy and humor. By the one we enter understandingly into life, while the other keeps us from taking life too tragically.

**His Life** Lamb was born (1775) in the midst of London, and never felt at home anywhere else. London is a world in itself, and of all its corners there were only three that Lamb found comfortable. The first was the modest little home where he lived with his gifted sister Mary, reading with her through the long evenings, or tenderly caring for her during a period of insanity; the second was the commercial house where he toiled as a clerk; the third was the busy street which lay between home and work,—a street forever ebbing and flowing with a great tide of human life that affected Lamb profoundly, mysteriously, as Wordsworth was affected by the hills or the sea.

The boy's education began at Christ's Hospital, where he met Coleridge and entered with him into a lifelong friendship. At fifteen



CHARLES LAMB

From the engraving by S. Aslett Edwards

the boy's education began at Christ's Hospital, where he met Coleridge and entered with him into a lifelong friendship. At fifteen

he left school to help support his family ; and for the next thirty-three years he was a clerk, first in the South Sea House, then in the East India Company. Rather late in life he began to write, his prime object being to earn a little extra money, which he sadly needed. Then the Company, influenced partly by his faithful service and partly by his growing reputation, retired him on a pension. Most eagerly, like a boy out of school, he welcomed his release, intending to do great things with his pen ; but curiously enough he wrote less, and less excellently, than before. His decline began with his hour of liberty. For a time, in order that his invalid sister might have quiet,



EAST INDIA HOUSE, LONDON

Where Charles Lamb worked for many years. From an engraving by M. Tombleson, after a drawing made by Thomas H. Shepherd in 1829

he lived outside the city, at Islington and Enfield ; but he missed the work, the street, the crowd, and especially did he miss his old habits. He had no feeling for nature, nor for any art except that which he found in old books. "I hate the country," he wrote ; and the cause of his dislike was that, not knowing what to do with himself, he grew weary of a day that was "all day long."

The earlier works of Lamb (some poems, a romance and a drama) are of little interest except to critics. The first book that brought him any considerable recognition was the *Tales from Shakespeare*. This was a summary of the stories used

by Shakespeare in his plays, and was largely the work of Mary Lamb, who had a talent for writing children's books. The charm of the *Tales* lies in the fact that the Lambs were so familiar with old literature that they reproduced the stories in a style which might have done credit to a writer in the days of Elizabeth. The book is still widely read, and is as good as any other if one wants that kind of book. But the chief thing in *Macbeth* or *The Tempest* is the poetry, not the tale or the plot; and even if one wants only the story, why not get it from Shakespeare himself? Another and better book by Lamb of the same general kind is *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets Contemporary with Shakespeare*. In this book he saves us a deal of unprofitable reading by gathering together the best of the Elizabethan dramas, to which he adds some admirable notes of criticism or interpretation.

Most memorable of Lamb's works are the essays which he contributed for many years to the London magazines, and *Essays of Elia* which he collected under the titles *Essays of Elia* (1823) and *Last Essays of Elia* (1830).<sup>1</sup> To the question, Which of these essays should be read? the answer given must depend largely upon personal taste. They are all



MARY LAMB

After the portrait by F. S. Cary

<sup>1</sup> The name "Elia" (pronounced ē'-li-ä) was a pseudonym, taken from an old Italian clerk (Ellia) in the South Sea House. When "Elia" appears in the *Essays* he is Charles Lamb himself; "Cousin Bridget" is sister Mary, and "John Elia" is a brother. The last-named was a selfish kind of person, who seems to have lived for himself, letting Charles take all the care of the family.

good ; they all contain both a reflection and a criticism of life, as Lamb viewed it by light of his personal experience. A good way to read the essays, therefore, is to consider them as somewhat autobiographical, and to use them for making acquaintance with the author at various periods of his life.

For example, "My Relations" and "Mackery End" acquaint us with Lamb's family and descent; "Old Benchers of the Inner Temple" with his early surroundings; "Witches and Other Night-fears" with his sensitive childhood; "Recollections of Christ's Hospital" and "Christ's Hospital Five-and-thirty Years Ago" with his school days and comradeship with Coleridge; "The South Sea House" with his daily work; "Old China" with his home life; "The Superannuated Man" with his feelings when he was retired on a pension; and finally, "Character of the Late Elia," in which Lamb whimsically writes his own obituary.

If these call for too much reading at first, then one may select three or four typical essays: "Dream Children," notable for its exquisite pathos; "Dissertation on Roast Pig," famous for its peculiar humor; and "Praise of Chimney Sweepers," of which it is enough to say that it is just like Charles Lamb. To these one other should be added, "Imperfect Sympathies," or "A Chapter on Ears," or "Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist," in order to appreciate how pleasantly Lamb could write on small matters of no consequence. Still another good way of reading (which need not be emphasized, since everybody favors it) is to open the *Essays* here or there till we find something that interests us,—a method which allows every reader the explorer's joy of discovery.

To read such essays is to understand the spell they have cast on successive generations of readers. They are, first of all, very personal; they begin, as a rule, with some pleasant trifle that interests the author; then, almost before we are aware, they broaden into an essay of life itself, an essay illuminated by the steady light of Lamb's sympathy or by the flashes

of his whimsical humor. Next, we note in the *Essays* their air of literary culture, which is due to Lamb's wide reading, and to the excellent taste with which he selected his old authors, — Sidney, Brown, Burton, Fuller, Walton and Jeremy Taylor. Often it was the quaintness of these authors, their conceits or oddities, that charmed him. These oddities reappear in his own style to such an extent that even when he speaks a large truth, as he often does, he is apt to give the impression of being a little hare-brained. Yet if you examine his queer idea or his merry jest, you may find that it contains more cardinal virtue than many a sober moral treatise.

On the whole *Elia* is the quintessence of modern essay-writing from Addison to Stevenson. There are probably no better works of the same kind in our literature. Some critics aver that there are none others so good.

**Thomas De Quincey (1785–1859).** It used to be said in a college classroom that what De Quincey wrote was seldom important and always doubtful, but that we ought to read him for his style; which means, as you might say, that caviar is a stomach-upsetting food, but we ought to eat a little of it because it comes in a pretty box.

To this criticism, which reflects a prevalent opinion, we may take some exceptions. For example, what De Quincey has to say of Style, though it were written in style-defying German, is of value to everyone who would teach that impossible subject.



THE LAMB BUILDING, INNER TEMPLE,  
LONDON

What he says or implies in "Levana" (the goddess who performed "the earliest office of ennobling kindness" for a newborn child, lifting him from the ground, where he was first laid, and presenting his forehead to the stars of heaven) has potency to awaken two of the great faculties of humanity, the power to think and the power to imagine. Again, many people are fascinated by dreams, those mysterious fantasies which carry

us away on swift wings to meet strange experiences; and what De Quincey has to say of dreams, though doubtful as a dream itself, has never been rivaled. To a few mature minds, therefore, De Quincey is interesting entirely apart from his dazzling style and inimitable rhetoric.

To do justice to De Quincey's erratic, storm-tossed life; to record his precocious youth, his marvelous achievements in school or college, his wanderings amid lonely mountains or more lonely city streets, his drug habits with their gorgeous



THOMAS DE QUINCEY

From an engraving by C. H. Jeens

dreams and terrible depressions, his timidity, his courtesy, his soul-solitude, his uncanny genius,—all that is impossible in a brief summary. Let it suffice, then, to record: that he resembled his friend Coleridge, both in his character and in his vast learning; that he studied in profound seclusion for twenty years; then for forty years more, during which time his brain was more or less beclouded by opium, he poured out a flood of magazine articles, which he collected later in fourteen chaotic volumes. These deal with an astonishing variety of subjects, and cover almost every phase of mental activity from portraying a nightmare to building a philosophical system. If he had any dominating interest in his strange life, it was the study of literature.

The historian can but name a few characteristic works of De Quincey, without recommending any of them to readers.

**Typical Works** To those interested in De Quincey's personality his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* will be illuminating. This book astonished Londoners in 1821, and may well astonish a Bushman in the year 2000. It records his wandering life, and the alternate transport or suffering which resulted from his drug habits. This may be followed by his *Suspiria de Profundis* (Sighs from the Depths), which describes, as well as such a thing could be done, the phantoms born of opium dreams.

There are too many of the latter, and the reader may well be satisfied with the wonderful "Dream Fugue" in *The English Mail Coach*.

As an illustration of De Quincey's review of history, one should try *Joan of Arc* or *The Revolt of the Tartars*, which are not historical studies but romantic dreams inspired by reading history. In the critical field, "The Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*," "Wordsworth's Poetry" and the "Essay on Style" are immensely suggestive. As an example of ingenious humor "Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts" is often recommended; but it has this serious fault, that it is not humorous. For a concrete example of De Quincey's matter and manner there is nothing better than "Levana or Our Ladies of Sorrow" (from the *Suspiria*), with its *mater lachrymarum* Our Lady of Tears, *mater suspriorum* Our Lady of Sighs, and that strange phantom, forbidding and terrible, *mater tenebrarum* Our Lady of Darkness.



DOVE COTTAGE, GRASMERE

Here both Wordsworth and De Quincey resided

The style of all these works is indescribable. One may exhaust the whole list of adjectives — chanting, rhythmic, De Quincey's cadenced, harmonious, impassioned — that have Style been applied to it, and yet leave much to say. Therefore we note only these prosaic elements : that the style reflects De Quincey's powers of logical analysis and of brilliant imagination ; that it is pervaded by a tremendous mental excitement, though one does not know what the stir is all about ; and that the impression produced by this nervous, impassioned style is usually spoiled by digressions, by hair-splitting, and by something elusive, intangible, to which we can give no name, but which blurs the author's vision as a drifting fog obscures a familiar landscape.

Notwithstanding such strictures, De Quincey's style is still, as when it first appeared, a thing to marvel at, revealing as it does the grace, the harmony, the wide range and the minute precision of our English speech.

**Summary.** The early nineteenth century is notable for the rapid progress of democracy in English government, and for the triumph of romanticism in English literature. The most influential factor of the age was the French Revolution, with its watchwords of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. English writers felt the stir of the times, and were inspired by the dream of a new human society ruled by justice and love. In their writing they revolted from the formal standards of the age of Pope, followed their own genius rather than set rules, and wrote with feeling and imagination of the two great subjects of nature and humanity. Such was the contrast in politics and literature with the preceding century that the whole period is sometimes called the age of revolution.

Our study of the literature of the period includes : (1) The poets Wordsworth and Coleridge, who did not so much originate as give direction to the romantic revival. (2) Byron and Shelley, often called revolutionary poets. (3) The poet Keats, whose works are famous for their sense of beauty and for their almost perfect workmanship. (4) A review of the minor poets of romanticism, Campbell, Moore, Hood, Beddoes, Hunt, and Felicia Hemans. (5) The life and works of Walter Scott, romantic poet and novelist. (6) A glance at the fiction writers of the period, and a study of the works of Jane Austen. (7) The critics and essayists, of whom we selected these two as the most typical : Charles Lamb, famous for his *Essays of Elia* ;

and De Quincey, notable for his brilliant style, his analysis of dreams, and his endeavor to make a science of literary criticism.

**Selections for Reading.** For general reference such anthologies as Manly's English Poetry and English Prose are useful. The works of major authors are available in various school editions, prepared especially for class use. A few of these handy editions are named below; others are listed in the General Bibliography.

Best poems of Wordsworth and of Coleridge in *Athenæum* Press Series. Briefer selections from Wordsworth in *Golden Treasury*, *Cassell's National Library*, *Maynard's English Classics*. Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* in *Standard English Classics*, *Pocket Classics*. Selections from Coleridge and Campbell in one volume of *Riverside Literature*.

Scott's *Lady of the Lake* and *Ivanhoe* in *Standard English Classics*; *Marmion* and *The Talisman* in *Pocket Classics*; *Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *Quentin Durward* in *Lake English Classics*; the same and other works of Scott in various other school editions.

Selected poems of Byron in *Standard English Classics*, *English Readings*. Best poems of Shelley in *Athenæum* Press; briefer selections in *Belles Lettres*, *Golden Treasury*, *English Classics*.

Selections from Keats in *Athenæum* Press, *Muses Library*, *Riverside Literature*.

Lamb's *Essays of Elia* in *Lake English Classics*; selected essays in *Standard English Classics*, *Temple Classics*, *Camelot Series*. Tales from Shakespeare in *Ginn and Company's Classics for Children*.

Selections from De Quincey, a representative collection, in *Athenæum* Press; *English Mail Coach* and *Joan of Arc* in *Standard English Classics*, *English Readings*; *Confessions of an Opium Eater* in *Temple Classics*, *Everyman's Library*; *Revolt of the Tartars* in *Lake Classics*, *Silver Classics*.

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in *Pocket Classics*; the same and other novels in *Everyman's Library*.

**Bibliography.** Extended works in English history and literature are listed in the General Bibliography. The following works are valuable in a study of the early nineteenth century and the romantic movement.

**History.** Morris, *Age of Queen Anne* and *the Early Hanoverians*; McCarthy, *The Epoch of Reform* (*Epochs of Modern History Series*); Cheyne, *Industrial and Social History of England*; Hassall, *Making of the British Empire*; Trevelyan, *Early Life of Charles James Fox*.

**Literature.** Saintsbury, *History of Nineteenth Century Literature*; Beers, *English Romanticism in the Nineteenth Century*; Symons, *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry*; Dowden, *French Revolution and*

English Literature; Hancock, French Revolution and The English Poets; Masson, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and Other Essays; De Quincey, Literary Reminiscences.

*Wordsworth.* Life, by Myers (English Men of Letters Series), by Raleigh. Herford, The Age of Wordsworth; Rannie, Wordsworth and his Circle; Sneath, Wordsworth, Poet of Nature and Poet of Man. Essays, by Lowell, in Among My Books; by M. Arnold, in Essays in Criticism; by Pater, in Appreciations; by L. Stephen, in Hours in a Library; by Hutton, in Literary Essays; by Bagehot, in Literary Studies.

*Coleridge.* Life, by Traill (E. M. of L.), by Hall Caine (Great Writers Series). Brandl, Coleridge and the English Romantic Movement. Essays, by Woodberry, in Makers of Literature; by Shairp, in Studies in Poetry and Philosophy; by Forster, in Great Teachers; by Dowden, in New Studies.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### THE VICTORIAN AGE (1837-1901)

The current sweeps the Old World,  
The current sweeps the New;  
The wind will blow, the dawn will glow,  
Ere thou hast sailed them through.

Kingsley, "A Myth"

**Historical Outline.** Amid the many changes which make the reign of Victoria the most progressive in English history, one may discover three tendencies which have profoundly affected our present life and literature. The first is political and democratic; it may be said to have begun with the Reform Bill of 1832; it is still in progress, and its evident end is to deliver the government of England into the hands of the common people. In earlier ages we witnessed a government which laid stress on royalty and class privilege, the spirit of which was clarioned by Shakespeare in the lines:

Not all the water in the rough rude sea  
Can wash the balm from an anointed king.

In the Victorian or modern age the divine right of kings is as obsolete as a suit of armor; the privileges of royalty and nobility are either curbed or abolished, and ordinary men by their representatives in the House of Commons are the real rulers of England.

With a change in government comes a corresponding change in literature. In former ages literature was almost as exclusive as politics; it was largely in the hands of the few; it was supported by princely patrons; it reflected the taste of the upper classes. Now the masses of men begin to be educated, begin to think for themselves, and a host of periodicals appear in answer to their demand for reading matter. Poets, novelists, essayists, historians,—all serious writers feel the inspiration of a great audience, and their works have a thousand readers where formerly they had but one. In a word, English government, society and literature have all become more democratic. This is the most significant feature of modern history.

The second tendency may be summed up in the word "scientific." At the basis of this tendency is man's desire to know the truth, if possible the whole truth of life; and it sets no limits to the exploring spirit, whether in the heavens above or the earth beneath or the waters under the earth. From star-dust in infinite space (which we hope to measure) to fossils on the bed of an ocean which is no longer unfathomed, nothing is too great or too small to attract man, to fascinate him, to influence his thought, his life, his literature. Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), which laid the foundation for a general theory of evolution, is one of the most famous books of the age, and of the world. Associated with Darwin were Wallace, Lyell, Huxley, Tyndall and many others, whose essays are, in their own way, quite as significant as the poems of Tennyson or the novels of Dickens.

It would be quite as erroneous to allege that modern science began with these men as to assume that it began with the Chinese or with Roger Bacon; the most that can be said truthfully is, that the scientific spirit which they reflected began to dominate our thought, to influence even our poetry and fiction, even as the voyages of Drake and Magellan furnished a mighty and mysterious background for the play of human life on the Elizabethan stage. The Elizabethans looked upon an enlarging visible world, and the wonder of it is reflected in their prose and poetry; the Victorians overran that world almost from pole to pole, then turned their attention to an unexplored world of invisible forces, and their best literature thrills again with the grandeur of the universe in which men live.

A third tendency of the Victorian age in England is expressed by the word "imperialism." In earlier ages the work of planting English colonies had been well done; in the Victorian age **Imperialism** the scattered colonies increased mightily in wealth and power, and were closely federated into a world-wide Empire of people speaking the same noble speech, following the same high ideals of justice and liberty.

The literature of the period reflects the wide horizons of the Empire. Among historical writers, Parkman the American was one of the first and best to reflect the imperial spirit. In such works as *A Half-Century of Conflict* and *Montcalm and Wolfe* he portrayed the conflict not of one nation against another but rather of two antagonistic types of civilization: the military and feudal system of France against the democratic institutions of the Anglo-Saxons. Among the

explorers, Mungo Park had anticipated the Victorians in his *Travels in the Interior of Africa* (1799), a wonderful book which set England to dreaming great dreams; but not until the heroic Livingstone's *Missionary Travels and Research in South Africa, The Zambesi and its Tributaries* and *Last Journals*<sup>1</sup> appeared was the veil lifted from the Dark Continent. Beside such works should be placed numerous stirring journals of exploration in Canada, in India, in Australia, in tropical or frozen seas, — wherever in the round world the colonizing genius of England saw opportunity to extend the boundaries and institutions of the Empire. Macaulay's *Warren Hastings*, Edwin Arnold's *Indian Idylls*, Kipling's *Soldiers Three*, — a few such works must be read if we are to appreciate the imperial spirit of modern English history and literature.

### I. POETS OF THE VICTORIAN AGE

#### ALFRED TENNYSON (1809-1892)

Though the Victorian age is notable for the quality and variety of its prose works, its dominant figure for years was the poet Tennyson. He alone, of all that brilliant group of Victorian writers, seemed to speak not for himself but for his age and nation; and the nation, grown weary of Byronic rebellion, and finding its joy or sorrow expressed with almost faultless taste by one whose life was noble, gave to Tennyson a whole-souled allegiance such as few poets have ever won. In 1850 he was made Laureate to succeed Wordsworth, receiving, as he said,

This laurel, greener from the brow  
Of him that uttered nothing base;

and from that time on he steadily adhered to his purpose, which was to know his people and to be their spokesman. Of all the poets who have been called to the Laureateship, he is probably the only one of whom it can truthfully be said that he understood his high office and was worthy of it.

<sup>1</sup> In connection with Livingstone's works, Stanley's *How I Found Livingstone* (1872) should also be read. Livingstone died in Africa in 1873, and his *Journals* were edited by another hand. For a summary of his work and its continuation see *Livingstone and the Exploration of Central Africa* (London, 1897).

**Life.** When we attempt a biography of a person we assume unconsciously that he was a public man; but that is precisely what Tennyson refused to be. He lived a retired life of thoughtfulness, of communion with nature, of friendships too sacred for the world's gaze, a life blameless in conduct, unswerving in its loyalty to noble ideals. From boyhood to old age he wrote poetry, and in that poetry alone, not in biography or letters or essays of criticism, do we ever touch the real man.

Tennyson was the son of a cultured clergyman, and was born in the rectory of Somersby, Lincolnshire, in 1809, the same year that



TENNYSON'S BIRTHPLACE, SOMERSBY RECTORY, LINCOLNSHIRE

saw the birth of Lincoln and Darwin. Like Milton he devoted himself to poetry at an early age; in his resolve he was strengthened by his mother; and from it he never departed. The influences of his early life, the quiet beauty of the English landscape, the surge and mystery of the surrounding sea, the emphasis on domestic virtues, the pride and love of an Englishman for his country and his country's history, — these are everywhere reflected in the poet's work.

His education was largely a matter of reading under his father's direction. He had a short experience of the grammar school at Louth, which he hated forever after. He entered Cambridge, and formed a

circle of rare friends ("apostles" they called themselves) who afterwards became famous; but he left college without taking a degree, probably because he was too poor to continue his course. Not till 1850 did he earn enough by his work to establish a home of his own. Then he leased a house at Farringford, Isle of Wight, which we have ever since associated with Tennyson's name. But his real place is the Heart of England.

His first book (a boyish piece of work, undertaken with his brother Charles) appeared under the title *Poems by Two Brothers* (1827). In

**A Poet and His Critics** 1830, and again in 1832, he published a small volume containing such poems as "The Palace of Art," "The Lotos-Eaters," "The Lady of Shalott" and "The Miller's Daughter"; but the critics of the age, overlooking the poet's youth and its promise, treated the volumes unmercifully. Tennyson, always sensitive to criticism, was sensible enough to see that the critics had ground for their opinions, if not for their harshness; and for ten long years, while he labored to perfect his art, his name did not again appear in print.

There was another reason for his silence. In 1833 his dearest friend, Arthur Hallam, died suddenly in Vienna, and it was years before Tennyson began to recover from the blow. His first expression of grief is seen in the lyric beginning, "Break, break, break," which contains the memorable stanza :

And the stately ships go on  
To their haven under the hill;  
But O for the touch of a vanished hand,  
And the sound of a voice that is still!

Then he began that series of elegies for his friend which appeared, seventeen years later, as *In Memoriam*.

**He Wins and Holds His Place** Influenced by his friends, Tennyson broke his long silence with a volume containing "Morte d'Arthur," "Locksley Hall," "Sir Galahad," "Lady Clare" and a few more poems which have never lost their power over readers; but it must have commanded attention had it contained only "Ulysses," that magnificent appeal to manhood, reflecting the indomitable spirit of all those restless explorers who dared unknown lands or seas to make wide the foundations of imperial England. It was a wonderful volume, and almost its first effect was to raise the hidden Tennyson to the foremost place in English letters.

Whatever he wrote thereafter was sure of a wide reading. Critics, workingmen, scientists, reformers, theologians,—all recognized the power of the poet to give melodious expression to their thought or feeling. Yet he remained averse to everything that savored of popularity, devoting himself as in earlier days to poetry alone. As a critic writes, "Tennyson never forgot that the poet's work was to convince the world of love and beauty; that he was born to do that work, and do it worthily."

There are two poems which are especially significant in view of this steadfast purpose. The first is "Merlin and the Gleam," which reflects Tennyson's lifelong devotion to his art; the other is "Crossing the Bar," which was his farewell and hail to life when the end came in 1892.

**Works of Tennyson.** There is a wide variety in Tennyson's work: legend, romance, battle song, nature, classic and mediæval heroes, problems of society, questions of science, the answer of faith,—almost everything that could interest an alert Victorian mind found some expression in his poetry. It ranges in subject from a thrush song to a religious philosophy, in form from the simplest love lyric to the labored historical drama.

Of the shorter poems of Tennyson there are a few which should be known to every student: first, because they are typical of the man who stands for modern English poetry; and second, because one is constantly meeting references to these poems in books or magazines or even newspapers. Among such representative poems are: "The Lotos-Eaters," a dream picture characterized by a beauty and verbal melody that recall Spenser's work; "Locksley Hall" and "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After," the one a romance throbbing with youth and hope, the other representing the same hero grown old, despondent and a little carping, but still holding fast to his ideals; "Sir Galahad," a medieval romance of purity; "Ulysses," an epitome of exploration in all ages; "The Revenge," a stirring war song; "Rizpah," a dramatic portrayal of a mother's grief for a wayward son; "Romney's Remorse,"

a character study of Tennyson's later years; and a few shorter poems, such as "The Higher Pantheism," "Flower in the Crannied Wall," "Wages" and "The Making of Man," which reflect the poet's mood before the problems of science and of faith.

To these should be added a few typical patriotic pieces, which show Tennyson speaking as Poet Laureate for his country: "Ode on the Death of Wellington," "Charge of the Light Brigade," "Defense of Lucknow," "Hands all Round," and the imperial appeal of "Britons, Hold Your Own" or, as it is tamely called, "Opening of the Indian and Colonial Exposition." The beginner may also be reminded of certain famous little melodies, such as the "Bugle Song," "Sweet and Low," "Tears," "The Brook," "Far, Far, Away" and "Crossing the Bar," which are among the most perfect that England has produced. And, as showing Tennyson's extraordinary power of youthful feeling, at least one lyric of his old age should be read, such as "The Throstle" (a song that will appeal especially to all bird lovers), beginning :

"Summer is coming, summer is coming,  
I know it, I know it, I know it;  
Light again, leaf again, life again, love again"—  
Yes, my wild little poet!



ALFRED TENNYSON

Here Tennyson is so merged in his subject as to produce the impression that the lyric must have been written not by an aged poet but by the bird himself. Reading the poem one seems to hear the brown thrasher on a twig of the wild-apple tree, pouring his heart out over the thicket which his mate has just chosen for a nesting place.

Of the longer works of Tennyson the most notable is the *Idylls of the King*, a series of twelve poems retelling part of the story of Arthur and his knights. Tennyson seems to have worked at this poem in haphazard fashion, writing the end first, then a fragment here or there, at intervals during half a century. Finally he welded his material into its present form, making it a kind of allegory of human life, in which man's animal nature fights with his spiritual aspirations. As Tennyson wrote, in his "Finale" to Queen Victoria:

Accept this old, imperfect tale,  
New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul.

The beginner will do well to forget the allegory and read the poem for its sustained beauty of expression and for its reflection of the modern ideal of honor. For, though Malory and Tennyson tell the same story, there is this significant difference between the *Morte d'Arthur* and the *Idylls of the King*: one is thoroughly medieval, and the other almost as thoroughly modern. Malory in simple prose makes his story the expression of chivalry in the Middle Ages; his heroes are true to their own time and place. Tennyson in melodious blank verse changes his material freely so as to make it a reflection of a nineteenth-century gentleman disguised in a suit of armor and some old knightly raiment.

One may add that some readers cleave to Tennyson, while others greatly prefer Malory. There is little or no comparison between the two, and selections from both should be read, if only to understand how this old romance of Arthur has appealed to writers of different times. In making a selection

from the *Idylls* (the length of the poem is rather forbidding) it is well to begin with the twelfth book, "The Passing of Arthur," which was first to be written, and which reflects the noble spirit of the entire work.

In *The Princess: a Medley* the poet attempts the difficult task of combining an old romantic story with a modern social problem; and he does not succeed very well in harmonizing his incongruous materials.

The story is, briefly, of a princess who in youth is betrothed to a prince. When she reaches what is called the age of discretion (doubtless because that age is so frequently marked by indiscretions) she rebels The  
Princess against the idea of marriage, and founds a college, herself the principal, devoted to the higher education of women. The prince, a gallant blade, and a few of his followers disguise themselves as girls and enter the school. When an unruly masculine tongue betrays him he is cast out with maledictions on his head. His father comes with an army, and makes war against the father of the princess. The prince joins blithely in the fight, is sore wounded, and is carried to the woman's college as to a hospital. The princess nurses him, listens to his love tale, and the story ends in the good old-fashioned way.

There are many beautiful passages in *The Princess*, and had Tennyson been content to tell the romantic story his work would have had some pleasant suggestion of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*; but the social problem spoils the work, as a moralizing intruder spoils a bit of innocent fun. Tennyson is either too serious or not serious enough; he does not know the answer to his own problem, and is not quite sincere in dealing with it or in coming to his lame and impotent conclusion. Few readers now attempt the three thousand lines of *The Princess*, but content themselves with a few lyrics, such as "Ask Me No More," "O Swallow Flying South," "Tears," "Bugle Song" and "Sweet and Low," which are familiar songs in many households that remember not whence they came.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The above criticism of *The Princess* applies, in some measure, to Tennyson's *Maud: a Monodrama*, a story of passionate love and loss and sorrow. Tennyson wrote also several dramatic works, such as *Harold*, *Becket* and *Queen Mary*, in which he attempted to fill some of the gaps in Shakespeare's list of chronicle plays.

More consistent than *The Princess* is a group of poems reflecting the life and ideals of simple people, to which Tennyson gave the general name of *English Idyls*. The longest and in some respects the best of these is "Enoch Arden," a romance which was once very popular, but which is now in danger of being shelved because the modern reader prefers his romance in prose form. Certain of the famous poems which we have already named are classed among these English idyls; but more typical of Tennyson's

purpose in writing them are "Dora," "The Gardener's Daughter" and "Aylmer's Field," in which he turns from ancient heroes to sing the romance of present-day life.

Among mature readers, who have met the sorrows of life or pondered its problems, the most admired of Tennyson's work is *In Memoriam* (1850), an elegy inspired by the death of Arthur Hallam. As a memorial poem it invites

comparison with others, with Milton's "Lycidas," or Shelley's "Adonais," or Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard." Without going deeply into the comparison we may note this difference: that Tennyson's work is more personal and sympathetic than any of the others. Milton had only a slight acquaintance with his human subject (Edward King) and wrote his poem as a memorial for the college rather than for the man; Shelley had never met Keats, whose early death he commemorates; Gray voiced an impersonal melancholy in the presence of the unknown dead; but Tennyson had lost his



SUMMERHOUSE AT FARRINGFORD  
Here Tennyson wrote "Enoch Arden"

dearest friend, and wrote to solace his own grief and to keep alive a beautiful memory. Then, as he wrote, came the thought of other men and women mourning their dead; his view broadened with his sympathy, and he wrote other lyrics in the same strain to reflect the doubt or fear of humanity and its deathless faith even in the shadow of death.

It is this combination of personal and universal elements which makes *In Memoriam* remarkable. The only other elegy to which we may liken it is Emerson's "Threnody," written after the death of his little boy. But where Tennyson offers an elaborate wreath and a polished monument, Emerson is content with a rugged block of granite and a spray of nature's evergreen.

*In Memoriam* occupied Tennyson at intervals for many years, and though he attempted to give it unity before its publication in 1850, it is still rather fragmentary. Moreover, it is too long; for the poet never lived who could write a hundred and thirty-one lyrics upon the same subject, in the same manner, without growing monotonous.

There are three more or less distinct parts of the work,<sup>1</sup> corresponding to three successive Christmas seasons. The first part (extending to poem 30) is concerned with grief and doubt; the second (to poem 78) exhibits a calm, serious questioning of the problem of faith; the third introduces a great hope amid tender memories or regrets, and ends (poem 106) with that splendid outlook on a new year and a new life, "Ring Out Wild Bells." This was followed by a few more lyrics of mounting faith, inspired by the thought that divine love rules the world and that our human love is immortal and cannot die. The work ends, rather incongruously, with a marriage hymn for Tennyson's sister.

The spirit of *In Memoriam* is well reflected in the "Proem" or introductory hymn, "Strong Son of God, Immortal Love"; its message is epitomized in the last three lines:

One God, one law, one element,  
And one far-off divine event  
To which the whole creation moves.

**The Quality of Tennyson.** The charm of Tennyson is two-fold. As the voice of the Victorian Age, reflecting its thought

<sup>1</sup> Tennyson divided *In Memoriam* into nine sections. Various attempts have recently been made to organize the poem and to make a philosophy of it, but these are ingenious rather than convincing.

or feeling or culture, its intellectual quest, its moral endeavor, its passion for social justice, he represents to us the spirit of modern poetry ; that is, poetry which comes close to our own life, to the aims, hopes, endeavors of the men and women of to-day. With this modern quality Tennyson has the secret of all old poetry, which is to be eternally young. He looked out upon a world from which the first wonder of creation had not vanished, where the sunrise was still "a glorious birth," and where love, truth, beauty, all inspiring realities, were still waiting with divine patience to reveal themselves to human eyes.

There are other charms in Tennyson : his romantic spirit, his love of nature, his sense of verbal melody, his almost perfect workmanship ; but these the reader must find and appreciate for himself. The sum of our criticism is that Tennyson is a poet to have handy on the table for the pleasure of an idle hour. He is also (and this is a better test) an excellent poet to put in your pocket when you go on a journey. So shall you be sure of traveling in good company.

### ROBERT BROWNING (1812-1889)

In their lifelong devotion to a single purpose the two chief poets of the Victorian Age are much alike ; in most other respects they are men of contrasts. Tennyson looked like a poet, Browning like a business man. Tennyson was a solitary singer, never in better company than when alone ; Browning was a city man, who must have the excitement of society. Tennyson's field was the nation, its traditions, heroes, problems, ideals ; but Browning seldom went beyond the individual man, and his purpose was to play Columbus to some obscure human soul. Tennyson was at times rather narrowly British ; Browning was a cosmopolitan who dealt broadly with humanity. Tennyson was the poet of youth, and will always be read by the young in heart ; Browning was the philosopher, the psychologist, the poet of mature years and of a few cultivated readers.

**Life.** Browning portrays so many different human types as to make us marvel, but we may partly understand his wide range of character-studies by remembering he was an Englishman with some Celtic and German ancestors, and among the latter was one having Creole blood. He was born and grew up at Camberwell, a suburb of London, and the early home of Ruskin. His father was a Bank-of-England clerk, a prosperous man and fond of books, who encouraged his boy to read and to let education follow the lead of fancy. Before Browning was twenty years old, father and son had a serious talk which ended in a kind of bargain: the boy was to live a life of culture, and the father was to take care of all financial matters, — an arrangement which suited them both very well.

Since boyhood Browning had been writing romantic verses, influenced first by Byron, then by Shelley, then by Keats. His first published works, *Pauline* and *Paracelsus*, were what he called soul-studies, the one of a visionary, "a star-treader" (its hero was Shelley), the other of a medieval astrologer somewhat like Faust. These two works, if one had the patience of a puzzle-worker to read them, would be found typical of all the longer poems that Browning produced in his sixty years of writing.

These early works were not read, were not even criticized; and it was not till 1846 that Browning became famous, not because of his books but because he eloped with Elizabeth Barrett, who was then the most popular poet in England.<sup>1</sup> The two went to Florence,



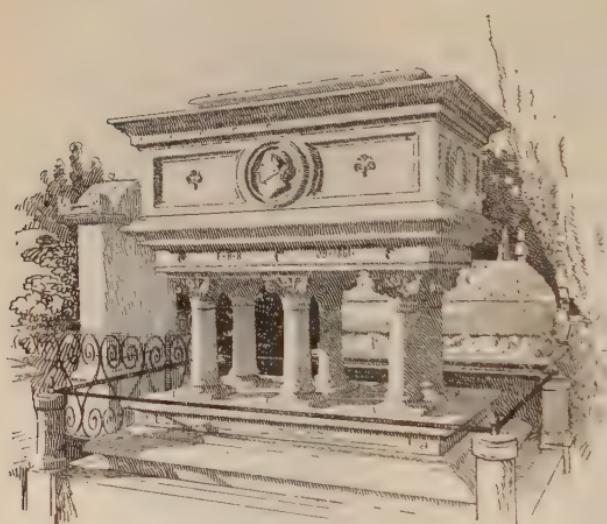
ROBERT BROWNING

<sup>1</sup> The fame of Miss Barrett in mid-century was above that of Tennyson or Browning. She had been for a long time an invalid. Her father, a tyrannical kind of person, insisted on her keeping her room, and expected her to die properly there. He had no personal objection to Browning, but flouted the idea of his famous daughter marrying with anybody.

discovered that they were "made for each other," and in mutual helpfulness did their best work. They lived at "Casa Guidi," a house made famous by the fact that Browning's *Men and Women* and Mrs. Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* were written there.

This happy period of work was broken by Mrs. Browning's death in 1861. Browning returned to England with his son, and to forget **The Brown-ing Cult** his loss he labored with unusual care on *The Ring and the Book* (1868), his bulkiest work. The rest of his life was spent largely in London and in Venice. Fame came to him tardily, and with some unfortunate results. He became known as a poet to

be likened unto Shakespeare, but more analytical, calling for a superior intelligence on the part of his readers; and presently a multitude of Browning clubs sprang up in England and America. Delighted with his popularity among the elect, Browning seems to have cultivated his talent for obscurity; or it may be that his natural eccentricity



MRS. BROWNING'S TOMB IN THE PROTESTANT  
CEMETERY AT FLORENCE

eccentricity of style increased with age, as did Wordsworth's prosiness. Whatever the cause, his work grew steadily worse until a succession of grammar-defying volumes threatened to separate all but a few devotees from their love of Browning. He died in Venice in 1889. On the day of his death appeared in London his last book, *Asolando*. The "Epilogue" to that volume is a splendid finale to a robust life:

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,  
Never doubted clouds would break,  
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,  
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,  
Sleep to wake.

Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar" is a beautiful swan song; but Browning's last poem is a bugle call, and it sounds not "taps" but the "reveille."

**Browning's Dramatic Quality.** Nearly all the works of Browning are dramatic in spirit, and are commonly dramatic also in form. Sometimes he writes a drama for the stage, such as *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, *Colombe's Birthday* and *In a Balcony*,—dramas without much action, but packed with thought in a way that would have delighted the Schoolmen. More often his work takes the form of a dramatic monologue, such as "My Last Duchess" and "The Bishop Orders his Tomb," in which one person speaks and, like Peter, his speech betrayeth him; for he reveals very plainly the kind of man he is. Occasionally Browning tries to sing like another poet, but even here his dramatic instinct is strong. He takes some crisis, some unexpected meeting or parting of the ways of life, and proceeds to show the hero's character by the way he faces the situation, or talks about it. So when he attempts even a love song, such as "The Last Ride Together," or a ballad, such as "The Pied Piper," he regards his subject from an unusual viewpoint and produces what he calls a dramatic lyric.

There are at least two ways in which Browning's work differs from that of other dramatists. When a trained playwright produces a drama his rule is, "Action, more action, and still more action." Moreover, he stands aside in order to permit his characters to reveal their quality by their own speech or action. For example, Shakespeare's plays are filled with movement, and he never tells you what he thinks of Portia or Rosalind or Macbeth, or what ought to become of them. He does not need to tell. But Browning often halts his story to inform you how this or that situation should be met, or what must come out of it. His theory is that it is not action but thought which determines human character; for a man may be doing what appears to be a brave or generous deed, yet be craven or selfish at heart; or he may be engaged in some

apparently sinful proceeding in obedience to a motive that we would acclaim as noble if the whole truth were known. "It is the soul and its thoughts that make the man," says Browning; "little else is worthy of study." So he calls most of his works soul-studies. If we label them now dramas, or dramatic monologues, or dramatic lyrics (the three classifications of his works), we are to remember that Browning is the one dramatist who deals with thoughts or motives rather than with action.

#### What to Read.

One should begin with the simplest of Browning's works, and preferably with those in which he shows some regard for verbal melody. As romantic love is his favorite theme, it is perhaps well to begin with a few of the love lyrics: "My Star," "By the Fireside," "Evelyn Hope," and espe-



THE PALAZZO REZZONICO, BROWNING'S HOME  
IN VENICE

cially "The Last Ride Together." To these may be added some of the songs that brighten the obscurity of his longer pieces, such as "I Send my Heart," "Oh Love — No Love" and "There's a Woman Like a Dewdrop." Next in order are the ballads, "The Pied Piper," "Hervé Riel" and "How they Brought the Good News"; and then a few miscellaneous short poems, such as "Home Thoughts from Abroad," "Prospice," "The Boy and the Angel" and "Up at a Villa — Down in the City."

The above poems are named not because they are particularly fine examples of their kind, but by way of introduction to **Dramatic Monologues** a poet who is rather hard to read. When these are known, and are found not so obscure as we feared, then will be the time to attempt some of Browning's dramatic monologues. Of these there is a large variety, portraying many different types of character, but we shall name only a few. "Andrea del Sarto" is a study of the great Italian painter, "the perfect painter," whose love for a pretty but shallow woman was as a millstone about his neck. "My Last Duchess" is a powerfully drawn outline of a vain and selfish nobleman. "Abt Vogler" is a study of the soul of a musician. "Rabbi ben Ezra," one of the most typical of Browning's works, is the word of an old man who faces death, as he had faced life, with magnificent courage. "An Epistle" relates the strange experience of Karshish, an Arab physician, as recorded in a letter to his master Abib. Karshish meets Lazarus (him who was raised from the dead) and, regarding him as a patient, describes his symptoms,—such symptoms as a man might have who must live on earth after having looked on heaven. The physician's half-scoffing words show how his habitual skepticism is shaken by a glimpse of the unseen world. He concludes, but his doubt is stronger than his conclusion, that Lazarus must be a madman:

"And thou must love me who have died for thee."  
The madman saith He said so: it is strange!

Another poem belonging to the same group (published under the general title of *Men and Women*) is "Saul," which finely illustrates the method that makes Browning different from other poets. He would select some familiar event, the brief record of which is preserved in history, and say, "Here we see merely the deed, the outward act or circumstance of life: now let us get acquainted with these men or women by showing that they thought and felt precisely as

we do under similar conditions." In "Saul" he reproduces the scene recorded in the sixteenth chapter of the first Book of Samuel, where the king is "troubled by an evil spirit" and the young David comes to play the harp before him. Saul is represented as the disillusioned, the despairing man who has lost all interest in life, and David as the embodiment of youthful enthusiasm. The poem is a remarkable portrayal of the ancient scene and characters; but it is something greater than that; it is a splendid song of the fullness and joy of a brave, forward-looking life inspired by noble ideals. It is also one of the best answers ever given to the question, Is life worth living? The length of the poem, however, and its many difficult or digressive passages are apt to repel the beginner unless he have the advantage of an abridged version.

Of the longer works of Browning, only *Pippa Passes* can be recommended with any confidence that it will give pleasure to the reader. Other works, such as *The Ring and the Book*,<sup>1</sup> are doubtless more famous; but reading them is like solving a puzzle: a few enjoy the matter, and therefore count it pleasure, but to the majority it is a task to be undertaken as mental discipline.

*Pippa* is the story of a working girl, a silk weaver of Asolo, who has a precious holiday and goes forth to enjoy it, wishing she could share her happiness with others, especially with the great people of her town. But the great live in another world, she thinks, a world far removed from that of the poor little working girl; so she puts the wish out of her head, and goes on her way singing:

<sup>1</sup> *The Ring and the Book* is remarkable for other things than its inordinate length. In it Browning tells how he found an old book containing the record of a murder trial in Rome,—a horrible story of a certain Count Guido, who in a jealous rage killed his beautiful young wife. That is the only story element of the poem, and it is told, with many irritating digressions, at the beginning. The rest of the work is devoted to "soul studies," the subjects being nine different characters who rehearse the same story, each for his own justification. Thus, Guido gives his view of the matter, and Pompilia the wife gives hers. "Half Rome," siding with Guido, is personified to tell one tale, and then "The Other Half" has its say. Final judgment rests with the Pope, an impressive figure, who upholds the decision of the civil judges. Altogether it is a remarkable piece of work; but it would have been more remarkable, better in every way, if fifteen thousand of its twenty thousand lines had been left in the inkpot.

The year 's at the spring,  
 And day 's at the morn ;  
 Morning 's at seven ;  
 The hillside 's dew-pearled ;  
 The lark 's on the wing ;  
 The snail 's on the thorn :  
 God 's in his heaven —  
 All 's right with the world !

It happens that her songs come, in succession, to the ears of the four greatest people in Asolo at moments when they are facing a terrible crisis, when a straw may turn them one way or the other, to do evil or to do good. In each case the song and the pure heart of the singer turn the scale in the right direction; but Pippa knows nothing of her influence. She enjoys her holiday and goes to bed still happy, still singing, quite ignorant of the wonder she has accomplished.

A mere story-teller would have brought Pippa and the rescued ones together, making an affecting scene with rewards, in the romantic manner; but Browning is content to depict a bit of ordinary human life, which is daily filled with deeds worthy to be written in a book of gold, but of which only the Recording Angel takes any notice.

**A Criticism of Browning.** Comparatively few people appreciate the force, the daring, the vitality of Browning, and those who know him best are least inclined to formulate a favorable



PIAZZA OF SAN LORENZO, FLORENCE

Where Browning bought the book in which he found the story of "The Ring and the Book"

criticism. They know too well the faults of their hero, his whims, crotchets, digressions, garrulity ; his disjointed ideas, like rich plums in a poor pudding ; his ejaculatory style, as of a man of second thoughts ; his wing-bound fancy, which hops around his subject like a grasshopper instead of soaring steadily over it like an eagle. Many of his lines are rather gritty :

Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed beast?  
and half his blank verse is neither prose nor poetry :

What, you, Sir, come too? (Just the man I'd meet.)  
Be ruled by me and have a care o' the crowd:  
This way, while fresh folk go and get their gaze:  
I'll tell you like a book and save your shins.  
Fie, what a roaring day we've had! Whose fault?  
Lorenzo in *Lucina*, — here's a church!

Instead of criticism, therefore, his admirers offer this word of advice: Try to like Browning; in other words, try to understand him. He is not "easy"; he is not to be read for relaxation after dinner, but in the morning and in a straight-backed chair, with eyes clear and intellect at attention. If you so read him, you must soon discover that he has something of courage and cheer which no other poet can give you in such full measure. If you read nothing else, try at least "Rabbi ben Ezra," and after the reading reflect that the optimism of this poem colors everything that the author wrote. For Browning differs from all other poets in this: that they have their moods of doubt or despondency, but he has no weary days or melancholy hours. They sing at times in the twilight, but Browning is the herald of the sunrise. Always and everywhere he represents "the will to live," to live bravely, confidently here; then forward still with cheerful hearts to immortality :

Grow old along with me!  
The best is yet to be,  
The last of life, for which the first was made:  
Our times are in his hand  
Who saith, "A whole I planned,  
Youth shows but half: trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"

## OTHER VICTORIAN POETS

**Elizabeth Barrett Browning** (1806-1861). Among the lesser poets of the age the most famous was Elizabeth Barrett, who eloped in romantic fashion with Browning in 1846. Her early volumes, written while she was an invalid, seem now a little feverish, but a few of her poems of childhood, such as "Hector" and "Little Ellie," have still their admirers. Later she became interested in social problems, and reflected the passion of the age for reform in such poems as "The Cry of the Children," a protest against child labor which once vied in interest with Hood's famous "Song of the Shirt." Also she wrote *Aurora Leigh*, a popular novel in verse, having for its subject a hero who was a social reformer. Then Miss Barrett married Robert Browning after a rather emotional and sentimental courtship, as reflected in certain extravagant pages of the Browning *Letters*.

In her new-found happiness she produced her most enduring work, the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850). This is a collection of love songs, so personal and intimate that the author thought perhaps to disguise them by calling them "From the Portuguese." In reality their source was no further distant than her own heart, and their hero was seen across the breakfast table every morning. They reflect Mrs. Browning's love for her husband, and those who read

Sonnets

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING



them should read also Browning's answer in "One Word More." Some of the sonnets ("I Thought How Once" and "How Do I Love Thee," for example) are very fine, and deserve their high place among love poems; but others, being too intimate, raise a question of taste in showing one's heart throbs to the public. Some readers may question whether many of the *Sonnets* and most of the *Letters* had not better been left exclusively to those for whom they were intended.

**Matthew Arnold** (1822-1888). The work of this poet (a son of Dr. Arnold of Rugby, made famous by *Tom Brown's Schooldays*) is in strong contrast to that of the Brownings, to the robust optimism of the one and to the emotionalism of the other. He was a man of two distinct moods: in his poetry he reflected the doubt or despair of those whose faith had been shaken by the alleged discoveries of science; in prose he became almost light-hearted as he bantered middle-class Englishmen for their old-fogy prejudices, or tried to awaken them to the joys of culture. In both moods he was coldly intellectual, appealing to the head rather than to the heart of his readers; and it is still a question whether his poetry or his criticism will be longest remembered.

Arnold is called the poet of Oxford, as Holmes is of Harvard, and those who know the beautiful old college town will best appreciate certain verses in which he reflects the quiet loveliness of a scene that has impressed so many students, century after century. To general readers one may safely recommend Arnold's elegies written in memory of the poet Clough, such as "Thyrsis" and "The Scholar Gypsy"; certain poems reflecting the religious doubts of the age, such as "Dover Beach," "Morality" and "The Future"; the love lyrics entitled "Switzerland"; and a few miscellaneous poems, such as "Resignation," "The Forsaken Merman," "The Last Word," and "Geist's Grave."

To these some critics would add the long narrative poem "Sohrab and Rustum," which is one of the models set before

students of "college English." The reasons for the choice are not quite obvious ; for the story, which is taken from the Persian *Shah Namah*, or Book of Kings, is rather coldly told, and the blank verse is far from melodious.

In reading these poems of Arnold his own motives should be borne in mind. He tried to write on classic lines, repressing the emotions, holding to a severe, unimpassioned style ; and he proceeded on the assumption that poetry is "a criticism of life." It is not quite clear what he meant by his definition, but he was certainly on the wrong trail. Poetry is the natural language of man in moments of strong or deep feeling ; it is the expression of life, of life at high tide or low tide ; when it turns to criticism it loses its chief charm, as a flower loses its beauty and fragrance in the hands of a botanist. Some poets, however (Lucretius among the ancients, Pope among the moderns, for example), have taken a different view of the matter.

Arnold's chief prose works were written, curiously enough, after he was appointed professor of poetry at Oxford. There *The Literary Critic* he proceeded, in a sincere but somewhat toplofty way, to enlighten the British public on the subject of culture. For years he was a kind of dictator of literary taste, and he is still known as a master of criticism ; but to examine his prose is to discover that it is notable for its even style and occasional good expressions, such as "sweetness and light," rather than for its illuminating ideas.



MATTHEW ARNOLD

For example, in *Literature and Dogma* and other books in which Arnold attempted to solve the problems of the age, he was apt to make large theories from a small knowledge of his subject. So in his *Study of Celtic Literature* (an interesting book, by the way) he wrote with surprising confidence for one who had no first-hand acquaintance with his material, and led his readers pleasantly astray in the flowery fields of Celtic poetry. Moreover, he had one favorite method of criticism, which was to take the bad lines of one poet and compare them with the good lines of another,—a method which would make Shakespeare a sorry figure if he happened to be on the wrong side of the comparison.

In brief, Arnold is always a stimulating and at times a provoking critic; he stirs our thought, disturbs our pet prejudices, challenges our opposition; but he is not a very reliable guide in any field. What one should read of his prose depends largely on one's personal taste. The essay *On Translating Homer* is perhaps his most famous work, but few readers are really interested in the question of hexameters. *Culture and Anarchy* is his best plea for a combination of the moral and intellectual or, as he calls them, the Hebrew and Greek elements in our human education. Among the best of the shorter works are "Emerson" in *Discourses in America*, and "Wordsworth," "Byron" and "The Study of Poetry" in *Essays in Criticism*.

**The Pre-Raphaelites.** In the middle of the nineteenth century, or in 1848 to be specific, a number of English poets and painters banded themselves together as a Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.<sup>1</sup> They aimed to make all art more simple, sincere, religious, and to restore "the sense of wonder, reverence and awe" which, they believed, had been lost since medieval times. Their sincerity was unquestioned; their influence, though small,

<sup>1</sup> The name was used earlier by some German artists, who worked together in Rome with the purpose of restoring art to the medieval simplicity and purity which, as was alleged, it possessed before the time of the Italian painter Raphael. The most famous artists of the English brotherhood were John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt.

was almost wholly good ; but unfortunately they were, as Morris said, like men born out of due season. They lived too much apart from their own age and from the great stream of common life out of which superior art proceeds. For there was never a great book or a great picture that was not in the best sense representative, that did not draw its greatness from the common ideals of the age in which it was produced.



THE MANOR HOUSE OF WILLIAM MORRIS

The first poet among the Pre-Raphaelites was Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), the son of an exiled Italian writer. Like others of the group he was both painter and poet, and seemed to be always trying to put into his verse the rich coloring which belonged on canvas. Perhaps the most romantic episode of his life was, that upon the death of his wife (the beautiful model, Lizzie Siddal, who appears in Millais' picture "Ophelia") he buried his poetry with her. After some years his friends persuaded him that his poems belonged to the living, and he exhumed and published them (*Poems*, 1870). His most notable volume, *Ballads and Sonnets*, appeared eleven years later. The ballads are nearly all weird, uncanny, but with

Rossetti

something in them of the witchery of Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner." The sonnets under the general title of "The House of Life" are devoted to the poet's lost love, and rank with Mrs. Browning's *From the Portuguese*.

William Morris (1834-1896) has been called by his admirers the most Homeric of English poets. The phrase was probably applied to him because of his *Sigurd the Volsung*, in which

he uses the material of an old Icelandic saga. There is a captivating vigor and swing in this poem, but it lacks the poetic imagination of an earlier work, *The Defence of Guenevere*, in which Morris retells in a new way some of the fading medieval romances. His best-known work in poetry<sup>1</sup> is *The Earthly Paradise*, a collection of twenty-four stories strung together on a plan somewhat resembling that of the *Canterbury Tales*. A band of mariners are cast away on an island inhabited by a superior race of



WILLIAM MORRIS

From a photograph by Walker and Cockerell

men, and to while away the time the seamen and their hosts exchange stories. Some of these are from classic sources, others from Norse legends or hero tales. The stories are gracefully told, in very good verse; but in reading them one has the impression that something essential is lacking, some touch, it may be, of present life and reality. For the island is but

<sup>1</sup> Some readers will be more interested in Morris's prose romances, *The House of the Wolfings*, *The Roots of the Mountains* and *The Story of the Glittering Plain*.

another Cloudland, and the characters are shadowy creatures having souls but no bodies; or else, as some may find, having the appearance of bodies and no souls whatever. Indeed, in reading the greater part of Pre-Raphaelite literature, one is reminded of Morris's estimate of himself, in the *Prelude to The Earthly Paradise*:

Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time,  
Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?  
Let it suffice me that my murmuring rhyme  
Beats with light wing against the ivory gate,  
Telling a tale not too importunate  
To those who in the sleepy region stay,  
Lulled by the singer of an empty day.

**Algernon Charles Swinburne** (1837-1909). This voluminous writer, born in the year of Victoria's accession, is yet so close to our own day that it is difficult to think of him as part of an age that is gone. As a poet he was a master of verbal melody, and had such a command of verse forms that he won his title of "inventor of harmonies." As a critic he showed a wide knowledge of English and French literature, a discriminating taste, and an enthusiasm which bubbled over in eulogy of those whom he liked, and which emptied vials of wrath upon Byron, Carlyle and others who fell under his displeasure. His criticisms are written in an extravagant, almost a torrential, style; at times his prose falls into a chanting rhythm so attractive in itself as to make us overlook the fact that the praise and censure which he dispenses with prodigal liberality are too personal to be quite trustworthy.

We are still too near Swinburne to judge him accurately, and his place in the long history of English poetry is yet to be determined. We note here only two characteristics, which may or may not be evident to other readers. In the first place, with his marvelous command of meter and melody, Swinburne has a fatal fluency of speech which tends to bury his thought in a mass of jingling verbiage. As we read we seem to hear the question, "What readest thou,

Hamlet?" and again the Dane makes answer, "Words, words, words." Again, like the Pre-Raphaelites with whom he was at one time associated, Swinburne lived too much apart from the tide of common life. He wrote for the chosen few, and in the mass of his verse one must search long for a passage of which one may say, This goes home to the hearts of men, and abides there in the treasure-house of all good poetry.

Among the longer works of Swinburne his masterpiece is the lyrical drama *Atalanta in Calydon*. If one would merely sample the flavor of the poet, such minor works as "Itylus" and the fine sea pieces, "Off Shore," "By the North Sea" and "A Forsaken Garden" may be recommended. Nor should we overlook what, to many, is Swinburne's best quality; namely, his love of children, as reflected in such poems as "The Salt of the Earth" and "A Child's Laughter." Among the best of his prose works are his *William Blake, Essays and Studies, Miscellanies and Studies in Prose and Verse*.

**Songs in Many Keys.** In calling attention to the above-named poets, we have merely indicated a few who seem to be chief; but the judgment is a personal one, and subject to challenge. The American critic Stedman, in his *Victorian Anthology*, recognizes two hundred and fifty singers; of these eighty are represented by five or more poems; and of the eighty a few are given higher places than those we have selected as typical. There are many readers who prefer the *Goblin Market* of Christina Rossetti to anything produced by her gifted brother, who place Jean Ingelow above Elizabeth Barrett, who find more pleasure in Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia* than in all the poems of Matthew Arnold, and who cannot be interested in even the best of Pre-Raphaelite verse because of its unreality. Many men, many minds! Time has not yet recorded its verdict on the Victorians, and until there is some settled criticism which shall express the judgment of several generations of men, the best plan for the beginner is to make acquaintance with all the minor poets in an anthology.

or book of selections. It may even be a mistake to call any of these poets minor ; for he who has written one song that lives in the hearts of men has produced a work more enduring than the pyramids.

## II. THE VICTORIAN NOVELISTS

### CHARLES DICKENS (1812-1870)

Among the Victorian novelists were two men who were frequent rivals in the race for fame and fortune. Thackeray, well born and well bred, with artistic tastes and literary culture, looked doubtfully at the bustling life around him, found his inspiration in a past age, and tried to uphold the best traditions of English literature. Dickens, with little education and less interest in literary culture, looked with joy upon the struggle for democracy, and with an observation that was almost microscopic saw all its picturesque details of speech and character and incident.

He was the eye of the mighty Victorian age, as Tennyson was its ear, and Browning its psychologist, and Carlyle its chronic grumbler.

**Life.** In the childhood of Dickens one may see a forecast of his entire career. His father, a good-natured but shiftless man (caricatured as Mr. Micawber in *David Copperfield*), was a clerk in the Navy Pay Office, at Portsmouth. There Dickens was born in 1812. The



CHARLES DICKENS

father's salary was £80 per year, enough at that time to warrant living in middle-class comfort rather than in the poverty of the lower classes, with whom Dickens is commonly associated. The mother was a sentimental woman, whom Dickens, with questionable taste, has caricatured as Mrs. Micawber and again as Mrs. Nickleby. Both parents were somewhat neglectful of their children, and uncommonly fond of creature comforts, especially of good dinners and a bowl of punch. Though there is nothing in such a family to explain Dickens's character, there is much to throw light on the characters that appear in his novels.

The boy himself was far from robust. Having no taste for sports, he amused himself by reading romances or by listening to his nurse's tales, — beautiful tales, he thought, which "almost scared **The Stage** him into fits." His elfish fancy in childhood is probably reflected in Pip, of *Great Expectations*. He had a strong dramatic instinct to act a story, or sing a song, or imitate a neighbor's speech, and the father used to amuse his friends by putting little Charles on a chair and encouraging him to mimicry, — a dangerous proceeding, though it happened to turn out well in the case of Dickens.

This stagey tendency increased as the boy grew older. He had a passion for private theatricals, and when he wrote a good story was not satisfied till he had read it in public. When *Pickwick* appeared (1837) the young man, till then an unknown reporter, was brought before an immense audience which included a large part of England and America. Thereafter he was never satisfied unless he was in the public eye ; his career was a succession of theatrical incidents, of big successes, big lecture tours, big audiences, — always the footlights, till he lay at last between the pale wax tapers. But we are far ahead of our story.

When Dickens was nine years old his family moved to London. There the father fell into debt, and by the brutal laws of the period **The London Streets** was thrown into prison. The boy went to work in the cellar of a blacking factory, and there began that intimate acquaintance with lowly characters which he used later to such advantage. He has described his bitter experience so often (in *David Copperfield* for instance) that the biographer may well pass over it. We note only this significant fact : that wherever Dickens went he had an instinct for exploration like that of a farm dog, which will not rest in a place till he has first examined all the neighborhood, putting his nose into every likely or unlikely spot that may shelter friend or

enemy. So Dickens used his spare hours in roaming the byways of London by night; so he gained his marvelous knowledge of that foreign land called The Street, with its flitting life of gamins and nondescripts, through which we pass daily as through an unknown country.

A small inheritance brought the father from prison; the family was again united, and for two years the boy attended the academy **The Scramble** which he has held up to the laughter and scorn of two **for Place** continents. There the genius of Dickens seemed suddenly to awaken. He studied little, being given to pranks and theatricals; but he discovered within him an immense ambition, an imperious will



GADSHILL PLACE, NEAR ROCHESTER

The last residence of Dickens

to win a place and a name in the great world, and a hopeful temper that must carry him over or under all obstacles.

No sooner was his discovery made than he left school and entered a law office, where he picked up enough knowledge to make court practices forever ridiculous, in *Bleak House* and other stories. He studied shorthand and quickly mastered it; then undertook to report Parliamentary speeches (a good training in oratory) and presently began a prosperous career as a reporter. This had two advantages; it developed his natural taste for odd people and picturesque incidents, and it brought him close to the great reading public. To please that

public, to humor its whims and prejudices, its love for fun and tears and sentimentality, was thereafter the ruling motive in Dickens's life.

His first literary success came with some short stories contributed to the magazines, which appeared in book form as *Sketches by Boz* **Literary Ventures** (1835). A publisher marked these sketches, engaged Dickens to write the text or letterpress for some comic pictures, and the result was *Pickwick*, which took England and America by storm. Then followed *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Old Curiosity Shop*, — a flood of works that made readers rub their eyes, wondering if such a fountain of laughter and tears were inexhaustible.

There is little else to record except this: that from the time of his first triumph Dickens held his place as the most popular writer in English. With his novels he was not satisfied, but wrote a history of England, and edited various popular magazines, such as *Household Words*. Also he gave public readings, reveling in the applause, the lionizing, which greeted him wherever he went. He earned much money; he bought the place "Gadshill," near Rochester, which he had coveted since childhood; but he was a free spender, and his great income was less than his fancied need. To increase his revenue he "toured" the States in a series of readings from his own works, and capitalized his experience in *American Notes* and parts of *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

A question of taste must arise even now in connection with these works. Dickens had gone to a foreign country for just two things, money and applause; he received both in full measure; then he bit the friendly hand which had given him what he wanted.<sup>1</sup> Thackeray, who followed him to America, had a finer sense of the laws of hospitality and good breeding.

In 1844 Dickens resolved to make both ends meet, and carried out his resolve with promptness and precision. To decrease expenses he went to the Continent, and lived there, hungry for the footlights,

<sup>1</sup> The chief source of Dickens's irritation was the money loss resulting from the "pirating" of his stories. There was no international copyright in those days; the works of any popular writer were freely appropriated by foreign publishers. This custom was wrong, undoubtedly, but it had been in use for centuries. Scott's novels had been pirated in the same way; and until Cooper got to windward of the pirates (by arranging for foreign copyrights) his work was stolen freely in England and on the Continent. But Dickens saw only his own grievance, and even at public dinners was apt to make his hosts uncomfortable by proclaiming his rights or denouncing their moral standards. Moreover, he had a vast conceit of himself, and, like most visitors of a week, thought he knew America like a book. It was as if he looked once at the welter cast ashore by mighty Lake Superior in a storm, and said, "What a dirty sea!"

till a series of stories ending with *Dombey and Son* put his finances on a secure basis. Then he returned to London, wrote more novels, *The Price of Popularity* and saved a fortune for his descendants, who promptly spent it. Evidently it was a family trait. More and more he lived on his nerves, grew imperious, exacting, till he separated from his wife and made wreck of domestic happiness. The self-esteem of which he made comedy in his novels was for him a tragedy. Also he resumed the public readings, with their false glory and nervous wear and tear, which finally brought him to the grave.

He died, worn out by his own exertions, in 1870. He had steadily refused titles and decorations, but a grateful nation laid his body to rest in the Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey. It is doubtful whether he would have accepted this honor, which was forced upon him, for he had declared proudly that by his works alone he would live in the memory of his countrymen.

**Works of Dickens.** In the early stories of Dickens is a promise of all the rest. His first work was called *Sketches by Boz*, and "Boz" was invented by some little girl (was it in *The Vicar of Wakefield?*) who could not say "Moses"; also it was a pet name for a small brother of Dickens. There was, therefore, something childlike in this first title, and childhood was to enter very largely into the novelist's work. He could hardly finish a story without bringing a child into it; not an ordinary child, to make us smile,



DICKENS'S BIRTHPLACE, LANDPORT,  
PORTSEA

but a wistful or pathetic child whose sorrows, since we cannot help them, are apt to make our hearts ache.

Dickens is charged with exaggerating the woes of his children, and the charge is true; but he had a very human reason **The Pathetic Element** for his method. In the first place, the pathetic quality of his children is due to this simple fact, that they bear the burden and the care of age. And burdens which men or women accept for themselves without complaint seem all wrong, and are wrong, when laid upon a child's innocent shoulders. Again, Dickens sought to show us our error in thinking, as most grown-ups do, that childish troubles are of small account. So they are, to us; but to the child they are desperately real. Later in life we learn that troubles are not permanent, and so give them their proper place; but in childhood a trouble is the whole world; and a very hopeless world it is while it lasts. Dickens knew and loved children, as he knew the public whom he made to cry with his Little Nell and Tiny Tim; and he had discovered that tears are the key to many a heart at which reason knocks in vain.

The second work, *Pickwick*, written in a harum-scarum way, is even more typical of Dickens in its spirit of fun and laughing. He had been engaged, as we have noted, to furnish a text for some comic drawings, thus reversing the usual order of illustration. The pictures were intended to poke fun at a club of sportsmen; and Dickens, who knew nothing of sport, bravely set out with Mr. Winkle on his rook-shooting. Then, while the story was appearing in monthly numbers, the illustrator committed suicide; Dickens was left with Mr. Pickwick on his hands, and that innocent old gentleman promptly ran away with the author. Not being in the least adventurous, Mr. Pickwick was precisely the person for whom adventures were lying in wait; but with his chivalrous heart within him, and Sam Weller on guard outside, he was not to be trifled with by cabman or constable. So these two took to the open road, and to the inns where punch, good

cheer and the unexpected were awaiting them. Never was such another book! It is not a novel; it is a medley of fun and drollery resulting from high animal spirits.

In his next novel, *Oliver Twist*, the author makes a new departure by using the motive of horror. One of his heroes is **The Motive of Horror** an unfortunate child, but when our sympathies for the little fellow are stretched to the point of tears, Dickens turns over a page and relieves us by Pickwickian laughter. Also he has his usual medley of picturesque characters and incidents, but the shadow of Fagin is over them all. One cannot go into any house in the book, and lock the door and draw the shades, without feeling that somewhere in the outer darkness this horrible creature is prowling. The horror which Fagin inspires is never morbid; for Dickens with his healthy spirit could not err in this direction. It is a boyish, melodramatic horror, such as immature minds seek in "movies," dime novels, secret societies, detective stories and "thrillers" at the circus.

In the fourth work, *Nicholas Nickleby*, Dickens shows that he is nearing the limit of his invention so far as plot is concerned. In this novel he seems to rest a bit by writing an old-fashioned romance, with its hero and villain and moral ending. But if you study this or any subsequent work of Dickens, you are apt to find the four elements already noted; namely, an unfortunate child, humorous interludes, a grotesque or horrible creature who serves as a foil to virtue or innocence, and a medley of characters good or bad that might be transferred without change to any other story. The most interesting thing about Dickens's men and women is that they are human enough to make themselves at home anywhere.

**What to Read.** Whether one wants to study the method of Dickens or to enjoy his works, there is hardly a better plan for the beginner than to read in succession *Pickwick*, *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*, which are as the seed plot out of which grow all his stories. For the rest, the reader must follow his own

fancy. If one must choose a single work, perhaps *Copperfield* is the most typical. "Of all my books," said Dickens, "I like this the best; like many parents I have my favorite child, and his name is David Copperfield." Some of the heroines of this book are rather stagey, but the Peggotys, Betsy Trotwood, Mrs. Gummidge, the Micawbers,— all these are unrivaled.



YARD OF REINDEER INN, DANBURY

The scene of the races, in *Old Curiosity Shop*

"There is no writing against such power," said Thackeray, who was himself writing *Pendennis* while Dickens was at work on his masterpiece.

Opinion is divided on the matter of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Some critics regard it as the finest of Dickens's work, revealing as it does his powers of description and of character-drawing without his usual exaggeration. Other critics, who regard the exaggeration of Dickens as his most characteristic quality, see in *Two Cities* only an evidence of his weakening power. It has perhaps this advantage over

other works of the author, that of them we remember only the extraordinary scenes or characters, while the entire story of *Two Cities* remains with us as a finished and impressive thing. But there is also this disadvantage, that the story ends and is done with, while *Pickwick* goes on forever. We may lose sight of the heroes, but we have the conviction, as Chesterton says, that they are still on the road of adventure, that Mr. Pickwick is somewhere drinking punch or making a speech, and that Sam Weller may step out from behind the next stable and ask with a droll wink what we are up to now.

It is hardly necessary to add that our reading of Dickens must not end until we are familiar with some of his Yuletide stories, in which he gladly followed the lead of Washington Irving. The best of all his short stories is *A Christmas Carol*, which one must read but not criticize. At best it is a farce, but a glorious, care-lifting, heart-warming farce. Would there were more of the same kind!

**A Criticism of Dickens.** The first quality of Dickens is his extravagant humor. This was due to the fact that he was alive, so thoroughly, consciously alive that his vitality overflowed like a spring. Here, in a word, is the secret of that bubbling spirit of prodigality which occasions the criticism that Dickens produced not characters but caricatures.

The criticism is true; but it proclaims the strength of the novelist rather than his weakness. Indeed, it is in the very His Ex-  
aggeration exaggeration of Dickens that his astonishing creative power is most clearly manifest. There is something primal, stupendous, in his grotesque characters which reminds us of the uncouth monsters that nature created in her sportive moods. Some readers, meeting with Bunsby, are reminded of a walrus; and who ever saw a walrus without thinking of the creature as nature's Bunsby? So with Quilp, Toots, Squeers, Pumblechook; so with giraffes, baboons, dodoes, dromedaries,—all are freaks from the æsthetic viewpoint, but think of the overflowing energy implied in creating them!

The same sense of prodigality characterized Dickens even in his sober moods, when he portrayed hundreds of human characters, and not a dead or dull person among them. To be sure they are all exaggerated ; they weep too copiously, eat or drink too intemperately, laugh too uproariously for normal men ; but to criticize their superabundant vitality is to criticize Beowulf or Ulysses or Hiawatha ; nay, it is to criticize life itself, which at high tide is wont to overflow in heroics or absurdity. The exuberance of Pickwick, Micawber, Pecksniff,

Sairey Gamp, Sam Weller and a host of others is perhaps the most normal thing about them ; it is as the rattling of a safety valve, which speaks not of stagnant water but of a full head of steam. For Dickens deals with life, and you can exaggerate life as much as you please, since there is no end to either its wisdom or foolishness. Nothing but a question can be added to the silent simplicity of death.

THE GATEHOUSE AT ROCHESTER, NEAR  
DICKENS'S HOME

Aside from his purpose of portraying life as he saw it, in all its strange complexity, Dickens had a twofold object in his Motive and Method writing. He was a radical democrat, and he aimed to show the immense hopefulness and compassion of Democracy on its upward way to liberty. He was also a reformer, with a profound respect for the poor, but no respect whatever for ancient laws or institutions that stood in the way of justice. The influence of his novels in establishing better schools, prisons, workhouses, is beyond measure ; but we are not so much interested in his reforms as in his method, which was unique. He aimed to make men understand the oppressed,



and to make a laughing stock of the oppressors; and he succeeded as no other had ever done in making literature a power in the land. Thus, the man or the law that stands defiantly against public opinion is beaten the moment you make that man or that law look like a joke; and Dickens made a huge joke of the parish beadle (as Mr. Bumble) and of many another meddlesome British institution. Moreover, he was master of this paradox: that to cure misery you must meet it with a merry heart,—this is on the principle that what the poor need is not charity but comradeship. By showing that humble folk might be as poor as the Cratchits and yet have the medicine of mirth, the divine gift of laughter, he made men rejoice with the poor even while they relieved the poverty.

As for the shortcomings of Dickens, they are so apparent that he who runs may read. We may say of him, as of Shake-

**His Faults** speare, that his taste is questionable, that he is too fond of a mere show, that his style is often melodramatic, that there is hardly a fault in the whole critical category of which he is not habitually guilty. But we may say of him also that he is never petty or mean or morbid or unclean; and he could not be dull if he tried. His faults, if you analyze them, spring from precisely the same source as his virtues; that is, from his abundant vitality, from his excess of life and animal spirits. So we pardon, nay, we rejoice over him as over a boy who must throw a handspring or raise a *whillie-w* when he breaks loose from school. For Dickens, when he started his triumphal progress with *Pickwick*, had a glorious sense of taking his cue from life and of breaking loose from literary traditions. In comparison with Ruskin or Thackeray he is not a good writer, but something more— a splendidly great writer. If you would limit or define his greatness, try first to marshal his array of characters, characters so vital and human that we can hardly think of them as fictitious or imaginary creatures; then remember the millions of men and women to whom he has given pure and lasting pleasure.

## WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY (1811-1863)

In fiction Thackeray stands to Dickens as Hamilton to Jefferson in the field of politics. The radical difference between the novelists is exemplified in their attitude toward the public. Thackeray, who lived among the privileged classes, spoke of "this great stupid public," and thought that the only way to get



WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

From a drawing by Samuel Laurence

a hearing from the common people was to "take them by the ears." He was a true Hamiltonian. Dickens had an immense sympathy for the common people, a profound respect for their elemental virtues; and in writing for them he was, as it were, the Jefferson, the triumphant democrat of English letters. Thackeray was intellectual; he looked at men with critical eyes, and was a realist and a pessimist. Dickens was emotional; he looked at men with kindled imagination, judged them by the dreams they cherished in

their hearts, and was a romanticist and an optimist. Both men were humorists; but where Thackeray was delicately satirical, causing us a momentary smile, Dickens was broadly comic or farcical, winning us by hearty laughter.

**Life.** To one who has been trained, like Dickens, in the school of hardship it seems the most natural thing in the world to pass over into a state of affluence. It is another matter to fare sumptuously every day till luxurious habits are formed, and then be cast suddenly

on one's own resources, face to face with the unexpected monster of bread and butter. This was Thackeray's experience, and it colored all his work.

A second important matter is that Thackeray had a great tenderness for children, a longing for home and homely comforts ; but as a child he was sent far from his home in India, and was thrown among young barbarians in various schools, one of which, the "Charterhouse," was called the "Slaughterhouse" in the boy's letters to his mother. "There are three hundred and seventy boys in this school," he wrote ; "I wish there were only three hundred and sixty-nine !" He married for love, and with great joy began housekeeping ; then a terrible accident happened, his wife was taken to an insane asylum, and for the rest of his life Thackeray was a wanderer amid the empty splendors of clubs and hotels.

These two experiences did not break Thackeray, but they bowed him. They help to explain the languor, the melancholy, the gentle pessimism, as if life had no more sunrises, of which we are vaguely conscious in reading *The Virginians* or *The Newcomes*.

Thackeray was born (1811) in Calcutta, of a family of English "nabobs" who had accumulated wealth and influence as factors or **Early Years** civil officers. At the death of his father, who was a judge in Bengal, the child was sent to England to be educated. Here is a significant incident of the journey :

"Our ship touched at an island, where my black servant took me a walk over rocks and hills till we passed a garden, where we saw a man walking. 'That is Bonaparte,' said the black ; 'he eats three sheep every day, and all the children he can lay hands on.'"

Napoleon was then safely imprisoned at St. Helena ; but his shadow, as of a terrible ogre, was still dark over Europe.

Thackeray's education, at the Charterhouse School and at Cambridge, was neither a happy nor a profitable experience, as we judge from his unflattering picture of English school life in *Pendennis*. He had a strongly artistic bent, and after leaving college studied art in Germany and France. Presently he lost his fortune by gambling and bad investments, and was confronted by the necessity of earning his living. He tried the law, but gave it up because, as he said, it had no soul. He tried illustrating, having a small talent for comic drawings, and sought various civil appointments in vain. As a last resource he turned to the magazines, wrote satires, sketches of travel, burlesques

of popular novelists, and, fighting all the time against his habit of idleness, slowly but surely won his way.

His first notable work, *Vanity Fair* (1847), won a few readers; and the critics' judgment that it was "a book written by a gentleman for gentlemen" was the foundation of Thackeray's reputation as a writer for the upper classes. Other notable novels followed, *Henry Esmond*, *Pendennis*, *The Newcomes*, *The Virginians*, and two series of literary and historical essays called *English Humorists* and *The Four Georges*. The latter were delivered as lectures in a successful tour of England and America. Needless to say, Thackeray hated lecturing and publicity; he was driven to his "dollar-hunting" by necessity.

**Literary Labor** In 1860 his fame was firmly established, and he won his first financial success by taking charge of the *Cornhill Magazine*, which prospered greatly in his hands. He did not long enjoy his new-found comfort, for he died in 1863. His early sketches had been satirical in spirit, his first novels largely so; but his last novels and his *Cornhill* essays were written in a different spirit,—not kinder, for Thackeray's heart was always right, but broader, wiser, more patient of human nature, and more hopeful.

In view of these later works some critics declare that Thackeray's best novel was never written. His stories were produced not joyously but laboriously, to earn his living; and when leisure came at last, then came death also, and the work was over.

**Works of Thackeray.** It would be flying in the face of all the critics to suggest that the beginner might do well to postpone the famous novels of Thackeray, and to meet the author at his best, or cheerfulest, in such forgotten works as the *Book of Ballads* and *The Rose and the Ring*. The latter is a kind of fairy story, with a poor little good princess, a rich little bad princess, a witch of a godmother, and such villainous characters as Hedzoff and Gruffanuff. It was written for some children whom Thackeray loved, and is almost the only book of his which leaves the impression that the author found any real pleasure in writing it.

If one must begin with a novel, then *Henry Esmond* (1852) is the book. This is an historical novel; the scene is laid in

the eighteenth century, during the reign of Queen Anne ; and it differs from most other historical novels in this important respect : the author knows his ground thoroughly, *Esmond* is familiar not only with political events but with the thoughts, ideals, books, even the literary style of the age which he describes. The hero of the novel, Colonel *Esmond*, is represented as telling his own story ; he speaks as a gentleman spoke in those days, telling us about the politicians, soldiers, ladies and literary men of his time, with frank exposure of their manners or morals. As a realistic portrayal of an age gone by, not only of its thoughts but of the very language in which those thoughts were expressed, *Esmond* is the most remarkable novel of its kind in our language. It is a prodigy of realism, and it is written in a charming prose style.

One must add frankly that *Esmond* is not an inspiring work, that the atmosphere is gloomy, and the plot a disappointment. The hero, after ten years of devotion to a woman, ends his romance by happily marrying with her mother. Any reader could have told him that this is what he ought to have done, or tried to do, in the beginning ; but Thackeray's heroes will never take the reader's good advice. In this respect they are quite human.

The two social satires of Thackeray are *Vanity Fair* (1847) and *The History of Arthur Pendennis* (1849). The former takes its title from that fair described in *Pilgrim's Progress*, where all sorts of cheats are exposed for sale ; and Thackeray makes his novel a moralizing exposition of the shams of society. The slight action of the story revolves about two unlovely heroines, the unprincipled Becky Sharp and the spineless Amelia. We call them both unlovely, though Thackeray tries hard to make us admire his tearful Amelia and to detest his more interesting Becky. Meeting these two contrasting characters is a variety of fools and snobs, mostly well-drawn, all carefully analyzed to show the weakness or villainy that is in them.

One interesting but unnoticed thing about these minor characters is that they all have their life-size prototypes in the novels of Dickens. Thackeray's characters, as he explains in his preface, are "mere puppets," who must move when he pulls the strings. Dickens does not have to explain that his characters are men and women who do very much as they please. That is, perhaps, the chief difference between the two novelists.

*Pendennis* is a more readable novel than *Vanity Fair* in this respect, that its interest centers in one character rather than in a variety of knaves or fools. Thackeray takes a *Pendennis* youthful hero, follows him through school and later life, and shows the steady degeneration of a man who is governed not by vicious but by selfish impulses. From beginning to end *Pendennis* is a penetrating ethical study (like George Eliot's *Romola*), and the story is often interrupted while we listen to the author's moralizing. To some readers this is an offense; to others it is a pleasure, since it makes them better acquainted with the mind and heart of Thackeray, the gentlest of Victorian moralists.

The last notable works of Thackeray are like afterthoughts. *The Virginians* continues the story of Colonel Esmond, and *After-thoughts* *The Newcomes* recounts the later fortunes of Arthur Pendennis. *The Virginians* has two or three splendid scenes, and some critics regard *The Newcomes* as the finest expression of the author's genius; but both works, which appeared in the leisurely form of monthly instalments, are too languid in action for sustained interest. We grow acquainted with certain characters, and are heartily glad when they make their exit; perhaps someone else will come, some adventurer from the road or the inn, to relieve the dullness. The door opens, and in comes the bore again to take another leave. That is realism, undoubtedly; and Laura Pendennis is as realistic as the mumps, which one may catch a second time. The atmosphere of both novels — indeed, of all Thackeray's greater

works, with the exception of *English Humorists* and *The Four Georges*—is rather depressing. One gets the impression that life among "the quality" is a dreary experience, hardly worth the effort of living.

**Thackeray: a Criticism.** It is significant that Thackeray's first work appeared in a college leaflet called "The Snob," and that it showed a talent for satire. In his earlier stories he plainly followed his natural bent, for his *Vanity Fair*, *Barry*



CHARTERHOUSE SCHOOL

After a rare engraving by J. Rogers from the drawing made by Thomas H. Shepherd at the time Thackeray was a student there

*Lyndon* (a story of a scoundrelly adventurer) and several minor works are all satires on the general snobbery of society. This tendency of the author reached a climax in 1848, when he wrote *The Book of Snobs*. It is still an entertaining book, witty, and with a kind of merciless fairness about its cruel passages; yet some readers will remember what the author himself said later, that he was something of a snob himself to write such a book. The chief trouble with the half of his work is that he was so obsessed with the idea of snobbery that he did injustice to humanity, or rather to his countrymen; for Thackeray

was very English, and interest in his characters depends largely on familiarity with the life he describes. His pictures of English servants, for instance, are wonderfully deft, though one might wish that he had drawn them with a more sympathetic pencil.

In the later part of his life the essential kindness of the man came to the surface, but still was he hampered by his experience and his philosophy. His experience was that life is too big to be grasped, too mysterious to be understood; therefore he faced life doubtfully, with a mixture of timidity and respect, as in *Henry Esmond*. His philosophy was that every person is at heart an egoist, is selfish in spite of himself; therefore is every man or woman unhappy, because selfishness is the eternal enemy of happiness. This is the lesson written large in *Pendennis*. He lived in the small world of his own class, while the great world of Dickens—the world of the common people, with their sympathy, their eternal hopefulness, their enjoyment of whatever good they find in life—passed unnoticed outside his club windows. He conceived it to be the business of a novelist to view the world with his own eyes, to describe it as he saw it; and it was not his fault that his world was a small one. Fate was answerable for that. So far as he went, Thackeray did his work admirably, portraying the few virtues and the many shams of his set with candor and sincerity. Though he used satire freely (and satire is a two-edged weapon), his object was never malicious or vindictive but corrective; he aimed to win or drive men to virtue by exposing the native ugliness of vice.

The result of his effort may be summed up as follows: Thackeray is a novelist for the few who can enjoy his accurate but petty views of society, and his cultivated prose style. He is not very cheerful; he does not seek the blue flower that grows in every field, or the gold that is at every rainbow's end, or the romance that hides in every human heart whether of rich or poor. Therefore are the young not conspicuous among his followers.

## MARY ANN EVANS, "GEORGE ELIOT" (1819-1880)

More than other Victorian story-tellers George Eliot regarded her work with great seriousness as a means of public instruction. Her purpose was to show that human life is effective only as it follows its sense of duty, and that society is as much in need of the moral law as of daily bread. Other novelists moralized more or less, Thackeray especially; but George Eliot made the teaching of morality her chief business.

**Life.** In the work as in the face of George Eliot there is a certain masculine quality which is apt to mislead one who reads *Adam Bede* or studies a portrait of the author. Even those who knew her well, and who tried to express the charm of her personality, seem to have overlooked the fact that they were describing a woman. For example, a friend wrote:

"Everything in her aspect and presence was in keeping with the bent of her soul. The deeply lined face, the too marked and massive features, were united with an air of delicate refinement, which in one way was the more impressive, because it seemed to proceed so entirely from within. Nay, the inward beauty would sometimes quite transform the outward harshness; there would be moments when the thin hands that entwined themselves in their eagerness, the earnest figure that bowed forward to speak and hear, the deep gaze moving from one face to another with a grave appeal, — all these seemed the transparent symbols that showed the presence of a wise, benignant soul."

That is very good, but somehow it is not feminine. So the impression has gone forth that George Eliot was a "strong-minded" woman; **A Clinging Vine** but that is far from the truth. One might emphasize her affectionate nature, her timidity, her lack of confidence in her own judgment; but the essence of the matter is this, that so dependent was she on masculine support that she was always idealizing some man, and looking up to him as a superior being. In short, she was one of "the clinging kind." Though some may regard this as traditional nonsense, it was nevertheless the most characteristic quality of the woman with whom we are dealing.

Mary Ann Evans, or Marian as she was called, was born (1819) and spent her childhood in Shakespeare's county of Warwickshire. Her father (whose portrait she has faintly drawn in the characters

of Adam Bede and Caleb Garth) was a strong, quiet man, a farmer and land agent, who made a companion of his daughter rather than **Her Girlhood** of his son, the two being described more or less faithfully in the characters of Maggie and Tom Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*. At twelve years of age she was sent to a boarding school; at fifteen her mother died, and she was brought home to manage her father's house. The rest of her education — which included music and a reading knowledge of German, Italian and Greek

— was obtained by solitary study at intervals of rest from domestic work. That the intervals were neither long nor frequent may be inferred from the fact that her work included not only her father's accounts and the thousand duties of housekeeping but also the managing of a poultry yard, the making of butter, and other farm or dairy matters which at that time were left wholly to women.

The first marked change in her life came at the age of twenty-two, when the household removed to Coventry, and Miss Evans was there brought in contact with the family of a wealthy ribbon-maker named Bray. He was a man of some culture, and the atmosphere of



GEORGE ELIOT

From a portrait painted in Rome by M. d'Albert Durade, and now in Geneva

his house, with its numerous guests, was decidedly skeptical. To Miss Evans, brought up in a home ruled by early Methodist ideals of piety, the change was a little startling. Soon she was listening to glib evolutionary theories that settled everything from an earthworm to a cosmos; next she was eagerly reading such unbaked works as Bray's *Philosophy of Necessity* and the essays of certain young scientists who, without knowledge of either philosophy or religion, were cocksure of their ability to provide "modern" substitutes for both at an hour's notice.

Miss Evans went over rather impulsively to the crude skepticism of her friends; then, finding no soul or comfort in their theories, she invented for herself a creed of duty and morality, without however tracing either to its origin. She was naturally a religious woman, and there is no evidence that she found her new creed very satisfactory. Indeed, her melancholy and the gloom of her novels are both traceable to the loss of her early religious ideals.

A trip abroad (1849) was followed by some editorial work on *The Westminster Review*, then the organ of the freethinkers. This in turn led to her association with **Her Union with Lewes** Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill and other liberals, and to her union with George Henry Lewes in 1854. Of that union little need be said except this: though it lacked the law and the sacrament, it seems to have been in other respects a fair covenant which was honestly kept by both parties.<sup>1</sup>

Encouraged by Lewes she began to write fiction. Her first attempt, "Amos Barton," was an excellent short story, and in 1859 she produced her first novel, *Adam Bede*, being then about forty years old. The great success of this work had the unusual effect of discouraging the author. She despaired of her ability, and began to agonize, as she said, over her work; but her material was not yet exhausted, and in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner* she repeated her triumph.

The rest of her life seems a matter of growth or of atrophy, according to your point of view. She grew more scientific, as she fancied, but she lost the freshness and inspiration of her earlier novels. The reason seems to be that her head was turned by her fame as a moralist and exponent of culture; so she forgot that she "was born to please," and attempted something else for which she had no particular ability: an historical novel in *Romola*, a drama in *The Spanish Gypsy*, a theory of social reform in *Felix Holt*, a study of the Hebrew race in *Daniel Deronda*, a book of elephantine gambols in *The Opinions of Theophrastus Such*. More and more she "agonized" over these works, and though each of them contained some scene or passage of rare power, it was evident even to her admirers that the pleasing novelist of the earlier days had been sacrificed to the moral philosopher.

<sup>1</sup> Lewes was separated from his first wife, from whom he was unable to obtain a legal divorce. This was the only obstacle to a regular marriage, and after facing the obstacle for a time the couple decided to ignore it. The moral element in George Eliot's works is due largely, no doubt, to her own moral sense; but it was greatly influenced by the fact that, in her union with Lewes, she had placed herself in a false position and was morally on the defensive against society.

The death of Lewes (1878) made an end, as she believed, of all earthly happiness. For twenty-four years he had been husband, **She Renews** friend and literary adviser, encouraging her talent, shielding her youth **Her Youth** from every hostile criticism. Left suddenly alone in the world, she felt like an abandoned child; her writing stopped, and her letters echoed the old gleeman's song, "All is gone, both life and light." Then she surprised everybody by marrying an American banker, many years her junior, who had been an intimate friend of the Lewes household. Once more she found the world "intensely interesting," for at sixty she was the same clinging vine, the same hero-worshiper, as at sixteen. The marriage occurred in 1880, and her death the same year. An elaborate biography, interesting but too fulsome, was written by her husband, John Walter Cross.

**Works.** George Eliot's first works in fiction were the magazine stories which she published later as *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858). These were produced comparatively late in life, and they indicate both originality and maturity, as if the author had a message of her own, and had pondered it well before writing it. That message, as reflected in "Amos Barton" and "Janet's Repentance," may be summarized in four cardinal principles: that duty is the supreme law of life; that the humblest life is as interesting as the most exalted, since both are subject to the same law; that our daily choices have deep moral significance, since they all react on character and their total result is either happiness or misery; and that there is no possible escape from the reward or punishment that is due to one's individual action.

Such is the message of the author's first work. In its stern insistence on the moral quality of life and of every human action, it distinguishes George Eliot from all other fiction writers of the period.

In her first three novels she repeats the same message with more detail, and with a gleam of humor here and there to light up the gloomy places. *Adam Bede* (1859) has been called a story of early Methodism, but in reality it is a story of moral principles which work their inevitable ends among simple

country people. The same may be said of *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and of *Silas Marner* (1861). The former is as interesting to readers of George Eliot as *Copperfield* is to readers of Dickens, because much of it is a reflection of a personal experience; but the latter work, having more unity, more story interest and more cheerfulness, is a better novel with which to begin our acquaintance with the author.

The scene of all these novels is laid in the country; the characters are true to life, and move naturally in an almost perfect setting. One secret of their success is that they deal with people whom the author knew well, and with scenes in which she was as much at home as Dickens was in the London streets. Each of the novels, notwithstanding its faulty or melancholy conclusion, leaves an impression so powerful that we gladly, and perhaps uncritically, place it among the great literary works of the Victorian era.

Of the later novels one cannot speak so confidently. They move some critics to enthusiasm, and put others to sleep.

Later Works Thus, *Daniel Deronda* has some excellent passages, and Gwendolen is perhaps the best-drawn of all George Eliot's characters; but for many readers the novel is spoiled by scientific jargon, by essay writing on the Jews and other matters of which the author knew little or nothing at first hand. In *Middlemarch* she returned to the scenes with which she was familiar and produced a novel which some critics rank very high, while others point to its superfluous essays and its proneness to moralizing instead of telling a story.



GRIFF HOUSE, GEORGE ELIOT'S EARLY HOME IN WARWICKSHIRE

*Romola* is another labored novel, a study of Italy during the Renaissance, and a profound ethical lesson. If you can read this work without criticizing its Italian views, you may find in the characters of Tito and Romola, one selfish and the other generous, the best example of George Eliot's moral method, which is to show the cumulative effect on character of everyday choices or actions. You will find also a good story, one of the best that the author told. But if you read *Romola* as an historical novel, with some knowledge of Italy and the Renaissance, you may decide that George Eliot — though she slaved at this novel until, as she said, it made an old woman of her — did not understand the people or the country which she tried to describe. She portrayed life not as she had seen and known and loved it, but as she found it reflected at second hand in the works of other writers.

**The Quality of George Eliot.** Of the moral quality of George Eliot we have already said enough. To our summary of her method this should be added, that she tried to make each of her characters not individual but typical. In other words, if Tito came finally to grief, and Adam arrived at a state of gloomy satisfaction (there is no real happiness in George Eliot's world), it was not because Tito and Adam lived in different times or circumstances, but because both were subject to the same eternal laws. Each must have gone to his own place whether he lived in wealth or poverty, in Florence or England, in the fifteenth or the nineteenth century. The moral law is universal and unchanging; it has no favorites, and makes no exceptions. It is more like the old Greek conception of Nemesis, or the Anglo-Saxon conception of Wyrd, or Fate, than anything else you will find in modern fiction.

In this last respect George Eliot again differs radically from her contemporaries. In her gloomy view of life as an unanswerable puzzle she is like Thackeray; but where Thackeray offers a cultured resignation, a gentlemanly making the best of a bad case, George Eliot advocates self-sacrifice for the good

of others. In her portrayal of weak or sinful characters she is quite as compassionate as Dickens, and more thoughtfully charitable; for where Dickens sometimes makes light of misery, and relieves it by the easy expedient of good dinners and all-around comfort for saints and sinners, *Fate and Self-sacrifice* George Eliot remembers the broken moral law and the suffering of the innocent for the guilty. Behind every one of her characters that does wrong follows an avenging fate, waiting the moment to exact the full penalty; and before every character that does right hovers a vision of sacrifice and redemption.

Her real philosophy, therefore, was quite different from that which her scientific friends formulated for her, and was not modern but ancient as the hills. On the one hand, she never quite freed herself from the old pagan conception of Nemesis, or Fate; on the other, her early Methodist training entered deep into her soul and made her mindful of the Cross that forever towers above humanity.

#### OTHER VICTORIAN NOVELISTS

We have followed literary custom rather than individual judgment in studying Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot as the typical Victorian novelists. On Dickens, as the most original genius of the age, most people are agreed; but the rank of the other two is open to question. There are critics besides Swinburne who regard Charlotte Brontë as a greater genius than George Eliot; and many uncritical readers find more pleasure or profit in the Barchester novels of Anthony Trollope than in anything written by Thackeray. It may even be that the three or four leading novels of the age were none of them written by the novelists in question; but it is still essential to know their works if only for these reasons: that they greatly influenced other story-tellers of the period, and that they furnish us a standard by which to judge all modern fiction.

To treat the many Victorian novelists adequately would in itself require a volume. We shall note here only a few leading figures, naming in each case a novel or two which may serve as an invitation to a better acquaintance with their authors.

The Brontë sisters, Charlotte and Emily, made a tremendous sensation in England when, from their retirement, they sent out certain works of such passionate intensity that readers who

had long been familiar with novels were startled into renewed attention. Reading these works now we recognize the genius of the writers, but we recognize also a morbid, unwholesome quality, which is a reflection not of English life but of the personal and unhappy temperament of two girls who looked on life first as a gorgeous romance and then as a gloomy tragedy.

Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) was perhaps the more gifted of the two sisters, and her best-known works are



CHARLOTTE BRONTË

*Jane Eyre* and *Villette*. The date of the latter novel (1853) was made noteworthy by the masterpiece of another woman novelist, Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865), who was the exact opposite of the Brontë sisters,—serene, well-balanced, and with a fund of delicious humor. All these qualities and more appeared in *Cranford* (1853), a series of sketches of country life (first contributed to Dickens's *Household Words*) which together form one of the most charming stories produced during the Victorian era. The same author wrote a few other novels and an admirable *Life of Charlotte Brontë*.

Charles Reade (1814-1884) was a follower of Dickens in his earlier novels, such as *Peg Woffington*; but he made one notable departure when he wrote *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861). This is a story of student life and vagabond life in Europe, in the stirring times that followed the invention of printing. The action moves rapidly; many different characters appear; the scene shifts from Holland across Europe to Italy, and back again; adventures of a startling kind meet the hero at every stage of his foot journey. It is a stirring tale, remarkably well told; so much will every uncritical reader gladly acknowledge. Moreover, there are critics who, after studying *The Cloister and the Hearth*, rank it with the best historical novels in all literature.

Anthony Trollope (1815-1882) began as a follower of Thackeray, but in the immense range of his characters and incidents he soon outstripped his master. Perhaps his best work is *Barchester Towers* (1857), one of a series of novels which picture with marvelous fidelity the life of a cathedral town in England.

Another novelist who followed Thackeray, and then changed his allegiance to Dickens, was Bulwer Lytton (1803-1873). He was essentially an imitator, a follower of the market, and before Thackeray and Dickens were famous he had followed almost every important English novelist from Mrs. Radcliffe to Walter Scott. Two of his historical novels, *Rienzi* and



MRS. ELIZABETH GASKELL

From the portrait by George Richmond, R.A.

*The Last Days of Pompeii*, may be mildly recommended. The rest are of the popular and somewhat trashy kind ; critics jeer at them, and the public buys them in large numbers.

One of the most charming books of the Victorian age was produced by Richard Blackmore (1825-1900). He wrote several novels, some of them of excellent quality, but they were all overshadowed by his beautiful old romance of *Lorna Doone*

(1869). It is hard to overpraise such a story, wholesome and sweet as a breath from the moors, and the critic's praise will be unnecessary if the reader only opens the book. It should be read, with *Cranford*, if one reads nothing else of Victorian fiction.

Two other notable romances of a vanished age came from the hand of Charles Kingsley (1819-1875). He produced many works in poetry and prose, but his fame now rests upon *Hypatia*, *Westward Ho!* and a few stories for children. *Hypatia* (1853)



RICHARD DODDRIDGE BLACKMORE

is an interesting novel dealing with the conflict of pagan and Christian ideals in the early centuries. *Westward Ho!* (1855) is a stirring narrative of seafaring and adventure in the days of Elizabeth. It has been described as a "stunning" boys' book, and it would prove an absorbing story for any reader who likes adventure were it not marred by one serious fault. The author's personal beliefs and his desire to glorify certain Elizabethan adventurers lead him to pronounce judgment of a

somewhat wholesale kind. He treats one religious party of the period to a golden halo, and the other to a lash of scorpions ; and this is apt to alienate many readers who else would gladly follow Sir Amyas Leigh on his gallant ventures in the New World or on the Spanish Main. Kingsley had a rare talent for writing for children (his heart never grew old), and his *Heroes* and *Water Babies* are still widely read as bedtime stories.

Of the later Victorian novelists, chief among them being Meredith, Hardy and Stevenson, little may be said here, as they are much too near us to judge of their true place in the long perspective of English literature. Meredith, with the analytical temper and the disconnected style of Browning, is for mature readers, not for young people. Hardy has decided power, but is too hopelessly pessimistic for anybody's comfort,— except in his earlier works, which have a romantic

charm that brightens the obscurity of his later philosophy.

In Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894) we have the spirit of romance personified. His novels, such as *Kidnapped* and *David Balfour*, are stories of adventure written in a Stevenson very attractive style ; but he is more widely known, among young people at least, by his charming *Child's Garden of Verses* and his *Treasure Island* (1883). This last is a kind of dime-novel of pirates and buried treasure. If one is to read



ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

From a photograph

stories of that kind, there is no better place to begin than with this masterpiece of Stevenson. Other works by the same versatile author are the novels, *Master of Ballantrae*, *Weir of Hermiston* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; various collections of essays, such as *Virginibus Puerisque* and *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*; and some rather thin sketches of journeying called *An Inland Voyage* and *Travels with a Donkey*.

The cheery spirit of Stevenson, who bravely fought a losing battle with disease, is evident in everything he wrote; and it was the author's spirit, quite as much as his romantic tales or fine prose style, that won for him a large and enthusiastic following. Of all the later Victorians he seems, at the present time, to have the widest circle of cultivated readers and to exercise the strongest influence on our writers of fiction.

### III. VICTORIAN ESSAYISTS AND HISTORIANS

There is rich reading in Victorian essays, which reflect not only the practical affairs of the age but also the ideals that inspire every great movement whether in history or literature. For example, the intense religious interests of the period, the growth of the Nonconformists or Independents, the Oxford movement, which aimed to define the historic position of the English Church, the chill of doubt and the glow of renewed faith in face of the apparent conflict between the old religion and the new science,—all these were brilliantly reflected by excellent writers, among whom Martineau, Newman and Maurice stand out prominently. The deep thought, the serene spirit and the fine style of these men are unsurpassed in Victorian prose.

Somewhat apart from their age stood a remarkable group of historians — Hallam, Freeman, Green, Gardiner, Symonds and others no less praiseworthy — who changed the whole conception of history from a record of political or military events to a profound study of human society in all its activities. In another typical group were the critics, Pater, Bagehot, Hutton, Leslie

Stephen, who have given deeper meaning and enlarged pleasure to the study of literature. In a fourth group were the scientists—Darwin, Wallace, Lyell, Mivart, Tyndall, Mill, Spencer, Huxley, and their followers—some of whom aimed not simply to increase our knowledge but to use the essay, as others used the novel, to portray some new scene in the old comedy of human life. Darwin was a great and, therefore, a modest man; but some of his disciples were sadly lacking in humor. Spencer and Mill especially wrote with colossal self-confidence, as if the world no longer wore its veil of mystery. They remind us, curiously, that while poetry endures forever, nothing on earth is more subject to change and error than so-called scientific truth.

It is impossible in a small volume to do justice to so many writers, reflecting nature or humanity from various angles, and

**Typical Writers** sometimes insisting that a particular angle was the only one from which a true view could be obtained. Some rigorous selection is necessary; and we name here for special study Macaulay, Carlyle, Ruskin, who are commonly regarded as the typical Victorian essayists. This selection does not mean, however, that some other group might not be quite as representative of their age and nation. Our chosen authors stand not for Victorian thought but only for certain interesting phases thereof. Macaulay, the busy man of affairs, voiced the pride of his generation in British traditions. Carlyle lived aloof, grumbling at democracy, denouncing its shams, calling it to repentance. Ruskin, a child of fortune, was absorbed in art till the burden of the world oppressed him; whereupon he gave his money to the cause of social reform and went himself among the poor to share with them whatever wealth of spirit he possessed. These three men, utterly unlike in character, were as one in their endeavor to make modern literature a power wherewith to uplift humanity. They illustrate, better even than poets or novelists, the characteristic moral earnestness of the Victorian era.

## THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY (1800-1859)

To many readers the life of Macaulay is more interesting than any of his books. For the details of that brilliantly successful life, which fairly won and richly deserved its success, the student is referred to Trevelyan's fine biography. We record here only such personal matters as may help to explain the exuberant spirit of Macaulay's literary work.



THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY

ing himself and his family, a hard matter, which he handled not only with his customary success but also with characteristic enthusiasm.

Next we note Macaulay's personal endowment, his gift of rapid reading, his marvelous memory which suggests Coleridge and Cotton Mather. He read everything from Plato to the trashiest novel, and after reading a book could recall practically the whole of it after a lapse of twenty years. To this photographic memory we are indebted for the wealth of quotation, allusion and anecdote which brightens almost every page of his writings.

After a brilliant career at college Macaulay began the study of law. At twenty-five he jumped into prominence by a magazine essay

**Life.** One notes first of all the man's inheritance. The Norse element predominated in him, for the name Macaulay (son of Aulay) is a late form of the Scandinavian *Olafson*. His mother was a brilliant woman of Quaker descent; his father, at one time governor of the Sierra Leone Colony in Africa, was a business man who gained a fortune in trade, and who spent the whole of it in helping to free the slaves. In consequence, when Macaulay left college he faced the immediate problem of support-

on Milton, and after that his progress was uninterrupted. He was repeatedly elected to Parliament; he was appointed legal adviser **His Brilliant Career** to the Supreme Council of India, in which position he acquired the knowledge that appears in his essays on Clive and Hastings; he became Secretary for War, and was elevated to the peerage as Baron Macaulay of Rothley. It was said of him at that time that he was "the only man whom England ever made a lord for the power of his pen."

The last thing we note, because it was to Macaulay of least moment, is his literary work. With the exception of the *History of England* his writing was done at spare moments, as a **His Recreation** relaxation from what he considered more important labors. In this respect, of writing for pleasure in the midst of practical affairs, he resembles the Elizabethan rather than the Victorian authors.

While at work on his masterpiece Macaulay suddenly faltered, worn out by too much work. He died on Christmas Day (1859) and was buried in the place which he liked best to visit, the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey. From the day on which he attracted notice by his Milton essay he had never once lost his hold on the attention of England. Gladstone summed up the matter in oratorical fashion when he said, "Full-orbed Macaulay was seen above the horizon; and full-orbed, after thirty-five years of constantly emitted splendor, he sank below it." But Macaulay's final comment, "Well, I have had a happy life," is more suggestive of the man and his work.

**Works of Macaulay.** Macaulay's poems, which he regarded as of no consequence, are practically all in the ballad style. Among them are various narratives from French or English history, such as "The Battle of Ivry" and "The Armada," and a few others which made a popular little book when they were published as *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842). The prime favorite not only of the *Lays* but of all Macaulay's works is "Horatius Cocles," or "Horatius at the Bridge." Those who read its stirring lines should know that Macaulay intended it not as a modern ballad but as an example of ancient methods of teaching history. According to Niebuhr the early history of Rome was written in the form of popular ballads; and

Macaulay attempted to reproduce a few of these historical documents in the heroic style that roused a Roman audience of long ago to pride and love of country.

The essays of Macaulay appeared in the magazines of that day; but though official England acclaimed their brilliancy and **The Essays** flooded their author with invitations to dine, nobody seemed to think of them as food for ordinary readers till a Philadelphia publisher collected a few of them into a book, which sold in America like a good novel. That was in 1841, and not till two years had passed did a London publisher gain courage to issue the *Critical and Historical Essays*, a book which vindicated the taste of readers of that day by becoming immensely popular.

The charm of such a book is evident in the very first essay, on Milton. Here is no critic, airing his rules or making his dry talk palatable by a few quotations; here is a live man pleading for another man whom he considers one of the greatest figures in history. Macaulay may be mistaken, possibly, but he is going to make you doff your hat to a hero before he is done; so he speaks eloquently not only of Milton but of the classics on which Milton fed, of the ideals and struggles of his age, of the Commonwealth and the Restoration,—of everything which may catch your attention and then focus it on one Titanic figure battling like Samson among the Philistines. It may be that your sympathies are with the Philistines rather than with Samson; but presently you stop objecting and are carried along by the author's eloquence as by a torrent. His style is the combined style of novelist and public speaker, the one striving to make his characters real, the other bound to make his subject interesting.

That is Macaulay's way in all his essays. They are seldom wholly right in their judgments; they are so often one-sided that the author declared in later life he would burn them all if he could; but they are all splendid, all worth reading, not simply for their matter but for their style and for the wealth

of allusion with which Macaulay makes his subject vital and interesting. Among the best of the literary essays are those on Bunyan, Addison, Bacon, Johnson, Goldsmith and Byron; among the historical essays one may sample Macaulay's variety in Lord Clive, Frederick the Great, Machiavelli and Mirabeau.

Careful readers may note a difference between these literary and historical essays. Those on Bunyan, Johnson and Goldsmith, for example (written originally for the *Encyclopædia Britannica*), are more finished and more careful of statement than others in which the author talks freely, sharing without measure or restraint "the heaped-up treasures of his memory."

Macaulay began to write his *History of England* with the declaration that he would cover the century and a half following the accession of James II (1685), and that he would make his story as interesting as any novel. Only the latter promise was fulfilled. His five volumes, the labor of more than a decade, cover only sixteen years of English history; but these are pictured with such minuteness and such splendor that we can hardly imagine anyone brave enough to attempt to finish the record in a single lifetime.

Of this masterpiece of Macaulay we may confidently say three things: that for many years it was the most popular historical work in our language; that by its brilliant style and absorbing interest it deserved its popularity, as literature if not as history; and that, though it contains its share of error and more than its share of Whig partisanship, it has probably as few serious faults as any other history which attempts to cover the immense field of the political, social and intellectual life of a nation. Read, for example, one of the introductory chapters (the third is excellent) which draws such a picture of England in the days of the Stuarts as no other historian has ever attempted. When you have finished that chapter, with its wealth of picturesque detail, you may be content to read Macaulay simply for the pleasure he gives you, and go to some other historian for accurate information.

## THOMAS CARLYLE (1795-1881)

There is little harmony of opinion concerning Carlyle, criticism of the man being divided between praise and disparagement. If you are to read only one of his works, it is perhaps advisable to avoid all biographies at first and to let the *Essay*

*on Burns or Heroes and Hero Worship* make its own impression. But if you intend to read more widely, some knowledge of Carlyle's personal history is essential in order to furnish the grain of salt with which most of his opinions must be taken.



THOMAS CARLYLE

From engraving by Sartain from a daguerrotype

went with him unchanged through a troubled and oft-complaining life.

Of his tearful school days in Annandale and of his wretched years at Edinburgh University we have glimpses in *Sartor Resartus*. In His the chapters of the same book entitled "The Everlasting Nay" and "The Everlasting Yea" is a picture of the conflict between doubt and faith in the stormy years when Carlyle was finding himself. He taught school, and hated it; he abandoned the ministry, for which his parents had intended him; he resolved on a literary life, and did hack work to earn his bread. All the while

**Life.** In the village of Ecclefechan Carlyle was born in 1795, the year before Burns's death. His father was a stone-mason, an honest man of caustic tongue; his mother, judged by her son's account, was one of nature's noblewomen. The love of his mother and a proud respect for his father were the two sentiments in Carlyle that

he wrestled with his gloomy temper or with the petty demons of dyspepsia, which he was wont to magnify into giant doubts and despairs.

In 1826 he married Jane Welsh, and went to live in a house she had inherited at Craigenputtock, or Hill of the Hawks. There on a lonely moorland farm he spent six or seven years, writing books which few cared to read; and there Emerson appeared one day ("He came Carlyle and and went like an angel," said the Carlyles) with the heartening news that the neglected writings were winning a great audience in America. The letters of Carlyle and Emerson, as edited by Charles Eliot Norton, are among the pleasantest results of Carlyle's whole career.

Carlyle's wife was a brilliant but nervous woman with literary gifts of her own. She had always received attention; she expected and probably deserved admiration; but so did Carlyle, who expected also to be made the center of all solicitude when he called heaven and earth to witness against democracy, crowing roosters, weak tea and other grievous afflictions. After her death (in London, 1866) he was plunged into deepest grief. In his *Reminiscences* and *Letters* he fairly deifies his wife, calling her his queen, his star, his light and joy of life, and portrays a companionship as of two mortals in a Paradise without a serpent. All that is doubtless as it should be, in a romance; but the unfortunate publication of Mrs. Carlyle's letters and journals introduced a jarring note of reality. A jungle of controversial writings has since grown up around the domestic relations of the Carlyles,—impertinent, deplorable writings, which serve no purpose but to make us cry, "Enough, let them rest in peace!" Both had sharp tongues, and probably both were often sorry.

From the moors the Carlyles went to London and settled for the remainder of their lives in a house in Cheyne Row, in the suburb of Chelsea. There Carlyle slowly won recognition, his success being founded on his *French Revolution*. Invitations began to pour in upon him; great men visited and praised him, and his fame spread as "the sage of Chelsea." Then followed his *Cromwell* and *Frederick the Great*, the latter completed after years of complaining labor which made wreck of home happiness. And then came a period of unusual irritation, to which we owe, in part at least, Carlyle's railings against progress and his deplorable criticism of England's great men and women,—poor little Browning, animalcular De Quincey, rabbit-brained Newman, sawdustish Mill, chattering

George Eliot, ghastly-shrieky Shelley, once-enough Lamb, stinted-scanty Wordsworth, poor thin fool Darwin and his book (*The Origin of Species*, of which Carlyle confessed he never read a page) which was wonderful as an example of the stupidity of mankind.

Such criticisms were reserved for Carlyle's private memoirs. The world knew him only by his books, and revered him as a great and good man. He died in 1881, and of the thousand notices which

appeared in English or American periodicals of that year there is hardly one that does not overflow with praise.

In the home at Chelsea were numerous letters and journals which Carlyle committed to his friend Froude the historian. The publication of these private papers raised a storm of protest. Admirers of Carlyle, shocked at the revelation of another side to their hero, denounced Froude for his disloyalty and malice; whereupon the literary world divided into two camps, the Jane Carlyleists and the Thomas Carlyleists, as they are still called. That Froude showed poor taste is evident; but we must acquit him of all malice. Private papers had been given him with the charge to publish them if he saw fit; and from them he attempted to draw not a flattering



CARLYLE'S HOUSE, CHEYNE ROW,  
CHELSEA, LONDON

but a truthful portrait of Carlyle, who had always preached the doctrine that a man must speak truth as he sees it. Nor will Carlyle suffer in the long run from being deprived of a halo which he never deserved. Already the crustiness of the man begins to grow dim in the distance; it is his rugged earnestness that will be longest remembered.

**Works of Carlyle.** The beginner will do well to make acquaintance with Carlyle in some of the minor essays, which

are less original but more pleasing than his labored works. Among the best essays are those on Goethe (who was Carlyle's first master), Signs of the Times, Novalis, and especially Scott and Burns. With Scott he was not in sympathy, and though he tried as a Scotsman to be "loyal to kith and clan," a strong touch of prejudice mars his work. With Burns he succeeded better, and his picture of the plowboy genius in misfortune is one of the best we have on the subject. This *Essay on Burns* is also notable as the best example of Carlyle's early style, before he compounded the strange mixture which appeared in his later books.

The most readable of Carlyle's longer works is *Heroes and Hero Worship* (1840), which deals with certain leaders in the fields of religion, poetry, war and politics. It is an interesting study to compare this work with the *Representative Men* of Emerson. The latter looks upon the world as governed by ideals, which belong not to individuals but to humanity. When some man appears in whom the common ideal is written large, other men follow him because they see in him a truth which they revere in their own souls. So the leader is always in the highest sense a representative of his race. But Carlyle will have nothing of such democracy; to him common men are stupid or helpless and must be governed from without. Occasionally, when humanity is in the Slough of Despond, appears a hero, a superman, and proceeds by his own force to drag or drive his subjects to a higher level. When the hero dies, humanity must halt and pray heaven to send another master.

It is evident before one has read much of *Heroes* that Carlyle is at heart a force-worshiper. To him history means the biography of a few heroes, and heroism is a matter of power, not of physical or moral courage. The hero may have the rugged courage of a Cromwell, or he may be an easy-living poet like Shakespeare, or a ruthless despot like Napoleon, or an epitome of all meanness like Rousseau; but if he shows

superior force of any kind, that is the hall-mark of his heroism, and before such an one humanity should bow down. Of real history, therefore, you will learn nothing from *Heroes*; neither will you get any trustworthy information concerning Odin, Mahomet and the rest of Carlyle's oddly consorted characters. One does not read the book for facts but for a new view of old matters. With hero-worshipers especially it ranks very high among the thought-provoking books of the past century.

Of the historical works<sup>1</sup> of Carlyle the most famous is *The French Revolution* (1837). On this work Carlyle spent <sup>The French</sup> much heart-breaking labor, and the story of the first <sup>Revolution</sup> volume shows that the author, who made himself miserable over petty matters, could be patient in face of a real misfortune.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it furnishes a striking example of Carlyle's method, which was not historical in the modern sense, but essentially pictorial or dramatic. He selected a few dramatic scenes, such as the storming of the Bastille, and painted them in flaming colors. Also he was strong in drawing portraits, and his portrayal of Robespierre, Danton and other actors in the terrible drama is astonishingly vigorous, though seldom accurate. His chief purpose in drawing all these pictures and portraits was to prove that order can never come out of chaos save by the iron grip of a governing hand. Hence, if you want to learn the real history of the French Revolution, you must seek elsewhere; but if you want an impression of it, an impression that burns its way into the mind, you will hardly find the equal of Carlyle's book in any language.

Of Carlyle's miscellaneous works one must speak with some hesitation. As an expression of what some call his prophetic

<sup>1</sup> These include *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* (1850) and *History of Frederick the Great* (1858).

<sup>2</sup> The manuscript of the first volume was submitted to Carlyle's friend Mill (him of the "sawdustish" mind) for criticism. Mill lent it to a lady, who lost it. When he appeared "white as a ghost" to confess his carelessness, the Carlysles did their best to make light of it. Yet it was a terrible blow to them; for aside from the wearisome labor of doing the work over again, they were counting on the sale of the book to pay for their daily bread.

mood, and others his ranting, one who has patience might try *Shooting Niagara* or the *Latter Day Pamphlets*. A reflection of his doctrine of honest work as the cure for social ills is found in *Past and Present*; and for a summary of his philosophy there is nothing quite so good as his early *Sartor Resartus* (1834).

The last-named work is called philosophy only by courtesy. The title means "the tailor retailored," or "the patcher repatched," and the book professed to be "a complete philosophy of clothes." Since everything wears clothes of some kind (the soul wears a body, and the body garments; earth puts forth grass, and the firmament stars; ideas clothe themselves in words; society puts on fashions and habits), it can be seen that Carlyle felt free to bring in any subject he pleased; and so he did. Moreover, in order to have liberty of style, he represented himself to be the editor not the author of *Sartor*. The alleged author was a German professor, Diogenes Teufelsdroeckh, an odd stick, half genius, half madman, whose chaotic notes Carlyle professed to arrange with a running commentary of his own.

In consequence of this overlabored plan *Sartor* has no plan at all. It is a jumble of thoughts, notions, attacks on shams, scraps of German philosophy,— everything that Carlyle wrote about during his seven-years sojourn on his moorland farm. The only valuable things in *Sartor* are a few autobiographical chapters, such as "The Everlasting Yea," and certain passages dealing with night, the stars, the yearnings of humanity, the splendors of earth and heaven. Note this picture of Teufels-droeckh standing alone at the North Cape, "looking like a little belfry":

"Silence as of death, for Midnight, even in the Arctic latitudes, has its character: nothing but the granite cliffs ruddy-tinged, the peaceable gurgle of that slow-heaving Polar Ocean, over which in the utmost North the great Sun hangs low and lazy, as if he too were slumbering. Yet is his cloud-couch wrought of crimson and cloth-of-gold; yet does his light stream over the mirror of waters, like a tremulous fire-pillar shooting downwards to the abyss, and hide itself under my feet. In such moments Solitude also

is invaluable; for who would speak, or be looked on, when behind him lies all Europe and Africa, fast asleep, except the watchmen; and before him the silent Immensity and Palace of the Eternal, whereof our Sun is but a porch-lamp?"

The book has several such passages, written in a psalmodic style, appealing to elemental feeling, to our sense of wonder or reverence before the mystery of life and death. It is a pity that we have no edition of *Sartor* which does justice to its golden nuggets by the simple expedient of sifting out the mass of rubbish in which the gold is hidden. The central doctrines of the book are the suppression of self, or selfishness, and the value of honest work in contrast with the evil of mammon-worship.

**A Criticism of Carlyle.** Except in his literary essays Carlyle's "rumfustianish growlery of style," as he called it, is so uneven that no description will apply to it. In moments of emotion he uses a chanting prose that is like primitive poetry. Sometimes he forgets Thomas Carlyle, keeps his eye on his subject, and describes it in vivid, picturesque words; then, when he has nothing to say, he thinks of himself and tries to hold you by his manner, by his ranting or dogmatism. In one mood he is a poet, in another a painter, in a third a stump speaker. In all moods he must have your ear, but he succeeds better in getting than in holding it. It has been said that his prose is on a level with Browning's verse, but a better comparison may be drawn between Carlyle and Walt Whitman. Of each of these writers the best that can be said is that his style was his own, that it served his purpose, and that it is not to be imitated.

In formulating any summary of Carlyle the critic must remember that he is dealing with a man of two sides, one prejudiced, dogmatic, jealous of rivals, the other roughly sincere. On either side Carlyle is a man of contradictions. For an odious dead despot like Frederick, who happens to please him, he turns criticism into eulogy;

and for a living poet like Wordsworth he tempers praise by spiteful criticism.<sup>1</sup> He writes a score of letters to show that his grief is too deep for words. He is voluble on "the infinite virtue of silence." He proclaims to-day that he "will write no word on any subject till he has studied it to the bottom," and to-morrow will pronounce judgment on America or science or some other matter of which he knows nothing. In all this Carlyle sees no inconsistency; he is sincere in either rôle, of prophet or stump speaker, and even thinks that humor is one of his prime qualities.

Another matter to remember is Carlyle's constant motive rather than his constant mistakes. He had the gloomy conviction that he was ordained to cry out against the shams of society; and as most modern things appeared to him as shams, he had to be very busy. Moreover, he had an eye like a hawk for the small failings of men, especially of living men, but was almost blind to their large virtues. This hawklike vision, which ignores all large matters in a swoop on some petty object, accounts for two things: for the marvelous detail of Carlyle's portraits, and for his merciless criticism of the faults of society in general, and of the Victorian age in particular.

Such a writer invites both applause and opposition, and in Carlyle's case the one is as hearty as the other. The only

<sup>1</sup> Carlyle's praise of Wordsworth's "fine, wholesome rusticity" is often quoted, but only in part. If you read the whole passage (in *Reminiscences*) you will find the effect of Carlyle's praise wholly spoiled by a heartless dissection of a poet, with whom, as Carlyle confessed, he had very slight acquaintance.



ARCH HOME, ECCLEFECHAN

The birthplace of Carlyle

point on which critics are fairly well agreed is that his rugged independence of mind and his picturesque style appealed powerfully to a small circle of readers in England and to a large circle in America. It is doubtful whether any other essayist, with the possible exception of the serene and hopeful Emerson, had a more stimulating influence on the thought of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

### JOHN RUSKIN (1819-1900)

The prose of Ruskin is a treasure house. Nature portrayed as everyman's Holy Land; descriptions of mountain or landscape, and more beautiful descriptions of leaf or lichen or the glint of light on a breaking wave; appreciations of literature, and finer appreciations of life itself; startling views of art, and more revolutionary views of that frightful waste of human life and labor which we call political economy,—all these and many more impressions of nature, art and human society are eloquently recorded in the ten thousand pages which are the work of Ruskin's hand.

If you would know the secret that binds all his work together, it may be expressed in two words, sensitiveness and sincerity. From childhood Ruskin was extremely sensitive to both beauty and ugliness. The beauty of the world and of all noble things that ever were accomplished in the world affected him like music; but he shrank, as if from a blow, from all sordidness and evil, from the mammon-worship of trade, from the cloud of smoke that hung over a factory district as if trying to shield from the eye of heaven so much needless poverty and aimless toil below. So Ruskin was a man halting between two opinions: the artist in him was forever troubled by the reformer seeking to make the crooked places of life straight and its rough places plain. He made as many mistakes as another man; in his pages you may light upon error or vagary; but you will find nothing to make you doubt his entire sincerity, his desire to speak truth, his passion for helping his fellow men.

**Life.** The early training of Ruskin may explain both the strength and the weakness of his work. His father was a wealthy wine merchant, his mother a devout woman with puritanic ideas of duty. Both parents were of Scottish and, as Ruskin boasted, of plebeian descent. They had but one child, and in training him they used a strange mixture of severity and coddling, of wisdom and nonsense.

The young Ruskin was kept apart from other boys and from the sports which breed a modesty of one's own opinion ; his time, work and lonely play were minutely regulated ; the slightest infringement of rules brought the stern discipline of rod or reproof. On the other hand he was given the best pictures and the best books ; he was taken on luxurious journeys through England and the Continent ; he was furnished with tutors for any study to which he turned his mind. When he went up to Oxford, at seventeen, he knew many things which are Greek to the ordinary boy, but was ignorant of almost everything that a boy knows, and that a man finds useful in dealing with the world.

There were several results of this early discipline. One **Training and its Results** was Ruskin's devotion to art, which came from his familiarity with pictures and galleries ; another was his minute study of natural objects, which were to him in place of toys ; a third was his habit of "speaking his mind" on every subject ; a fourth was his rhythmic prose style, which came largely from his daily habit of memorizing the Bible. Still another result of his lonely magnificence, in which he was deprived of boys' society, was that his affection went out on a flood tide of romance to the first attractive girl he met. So he loved, and was laughed at, and was desperately unhappy. Then he married, not the woman of his choice, but one whom his parents



JOHN RUSKIN

From a photograph by Elliott and Fry

picked out for him. The tastes of the couple were hopelessly different; the end was estrangement, with humiliation and sorrow for Ruskin.

At twenty-four he produced his first important work, *Modern Painters* (1843), which he began as a defense of the neglected artist **Twenty Years of Art** Turner. This controversial book led Ruskin to a deeper study of his subject, which resulted in four more volumes on modern painting. Before these were completed he had "fairly created a new literature of art" by his *Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *Stones of Venice*. He was appointed professor of fine arts at Oxford; he gave several series of lectures which appeared later as *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, *Michael Angelo and Tintoret*, *Val d'Arno* and *The Art of England*.

By this time he was renowned as an art critic; but his theories were strongly opposed and he was continually in hot water. In his zeal to defend Turner or Millais or Burne-Jones he was rather slashing in his criticism of other artists. The libel suit brought against him by Whistler, whom he described as a coxcomb who flung a pot of paint in the face of the public, is still talked about in England. The jury (fancy a jury wrestling with a question of art!) found Ruskin guilty, and decided that he should pay for the artist's damaged reputation the sum of one farthing. Whistler ever afterwards wore the coin on his watch chain.

It was about the year 1860 that Ruskin came under the influence of Carlyle, and then began the effort at social reform which made **Ruskin the Reformer** a wreck of fame and hope and peace of mind. Carlyle had merely preached of manual work; but Ruskin, whole-hearted in whatever he did, went out to mend roads and do other useful tasks to show his belief in the doctrine. Carlyle railed against the industrial system of England; but Ruskin devoted his fortune to remedying its evils. He established model tenements; he founded libraries and centers of recreation for workingmen; he took women and children out of factories and set them to spinning or weaving in their own homes; he founded St. George's Guild, a well-housed community which combined work with education, and which shared profits fairly among the workers.

England at first rubbed its eyes at these reforms, then shrugged its shoulders as at a harmless kind of madman. But Ruskin had the temper of a crusader; his sword was out against what was even then called "vested interests," and presently his theories aroused a tempest of opposition. Thackeray, who as editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*

had gladly published Ruskin's first economic essays, was forced by the clamor of readers to discontinue the series.<sup>1</sup> To this reform period belong *Unto This Last* and other books dealing with political economy, and also *Sesame and Lilies*, *Crown of Wild Olive* and *Ethics of the Dust*, which were written chiefly for young people.

For twenty years this crusade continued; then, worn out and misunderstood by both capitalists and workingmen, Ruskin retired (1879) **End of the Crusade** to a small estate called "Brantwood" in the Lake District. His fortune had been spent in his attempt to improve labor conditions, and he lived now upon the modest income from his books. Before he died, in 1900, his friend Charles Eliot Norton persuaded him to write the story of his early life in *Præterita*. The title is strange, but the book itself is, with one exception, the most interesting of Ruskin's works.

**Works of Ruskin.** The works of Ruskin fall naturally into three classes, which are called criticisms of art, industry and life, but which are, in fact, profound studies of the origin and meaning of art on the one hand, and of the infinite value of human life on the other.

The most popular of his art criticisms are *St. Mark's Rest* and *Mornings in Florence*, which are widely used as guide-books, and which may be postponed until the happy time when, in Venice or Florence, one may read them to best advantage. Meanwhile, in *Seven Lamps of Architecture* or *Stones of Venice* or the first two volumes of *Modern Painters*, one may grow acquainted with Ruskin's theory of art.

His fundamental principle was summarized by Pope in the line, "All nature is but art unknown to thee." That nature is the artist's source of inspiration, that art at its best can but copy some natural beauty, and that the copy should be preceded by careful and loving study of the original, — this was the sum of his early teaching. Next, Ruskin looked

<sup>1</sup> While these essays were appearing, there was published (1864) a textbook of English literature. It spoke well of Ruskin's books of art, but added, "Of late he has lost his way and has written things — papers in the *Cornhill* chiefly — which are not likely to add to his fame as a writer or to his character as a man of common sense" (Collier, *History of English Literature*, p. 512).

within the soul of the artist and announced that true art has a spiritual motive, that it springs from the noblest ideals of life, that the moral value of any people may be read in the pictures or buildings which they produced. A third principle was that the best works of art, reflecting as they do the ideals of a community, should belong to the people, not to a few collectors ; and a fourth exalted the usefulness of art in increasing not only the pleasure but the power of life. So Ruskin urged that art be taught in all schools and workshops, and that every man be encouraged to put the stamp of beauty as well as of utility upon the work of his hands ; so also he formulated a plan to abolish factories, and by a system of hand labor to give every worker the chance and the joy of self-expression.

In his theory of economics Ruskin was even more revolutionary. He wrote several works on the subject, but the sum of **Theory of Economics** his teaching may be found in *Unto This Last* ; and the sum is that political economy is merely commercial economy ; that it aims to increase trade and wealth at the expense of men and morals. "There is no wealth but life," announced Ruskin, "life including all its power of love, of joy and of admiration." And with minute exactness he outlined a plan for making the nation wealthy, not by more factories and ships, but by increasing the health and happiness of human beings.

Three quarters of a century earlier Thomas Jefferson, in America, had pleaded for the same ideal of national wealth, and had characterized the race of the nations for commercial supremacy as a contagion of insanity. Jefferson was called a demagogue, Ruskin a madman ; but both men were profoundly right in estimating the wealth of a nation by its store of happiness for home consumption rather than by its store of goods for export. They were misunderstood because they were too far in advance of their age to speak its trade language. They belong not to the past or present, but to the future.

If but one work of Ruskin is to be read, let it be *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), which is one of the books that no intelligent

reader can afford to neglect. The first chapter, "Of Kings' Treasures," is a noble essay on the subject of reading. The **For Young Readers** second, "Of Queens' Gardens," is a study of woman's life and education, a study which may appear old-fashioned now, but which has so much of truth and beauty that it must again, like Colonial furniture, become our best fashion. These two essays<sup>1</sup> contain Ruskin's best thought on books and womanly character, and also an outline of his teaching on nature, art and society. If we read *Sesame and Lilies* in connection with two other little books, *Crown of Wild Olive*, which treats of work, trade and war, and *Ethics of the Dust*, which deals with housekeeping, we shall have the best that Ruskin produced for his younger disciples.

**The Quality of Ruskin.** To the sensitiveness and sincerity of Ruskin we have already called attention. There is a third quality which appears frequently, and which we call pedagogical insistence, because the author seems to labor under the impression that he must drive something into one's head.

This insistent note is apt to offend readers until they learn of Ruskin's motive and experience. He lived in a commercial age, an age that seemed to him blind to the beauty of the world; and the purpose of his whole life was, as he said, to help those who, having eyes, see not. His aim was high, his effort heroic; but for all his pains he was called a visionary, a man with a dream book. Yet he was always exact and specific. He would say, "Go to a certain spot at a certain hour, look in a certain direction, and such and such beauties shall ye see." And people would go, and wag their heads, and declare that no such prospect as Ruskin described was visible to mortal eyes.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A third essay, "The Mystery of Life," was added to *Sesame and Lilies*. It is a sad, despairing monologue, and the book might be better without it.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Ruskin gave in *Fors Clavigera* a description of a beautiful view from a bridge over the Ettrick, in Scotland. Some people have sought that view in vain, and a recent critic insists that it is invisible (Andrew Lang, *History of English Literature*, p. 592). In Venice or Florence you may still meet travelers with one of Ruskin's books in hand, peering about for the beauty which he says is apparent from such and such a spot and which every traveler ought to see.

Naturally Ruskin, with his dogmatic temper, grew impatient of such blindness; hence the increasing note of insistence, of scolding even, to which critics have called attention. But we can forgive much in a writer who, with marvelously clear vision, sought only to point out the beauty of nature and the moral dignity of humanity.

The beauty of Ruskin's style, its musical rhythm or cadence, its wealth of figure and allusion, its brilliant coloring, like a Ruskin's  
Style landscape of his favorite artist Turner,—all this is a source of pleasure to the reader, entirely aside from the subject matter. Read, for example, the description of St. Mark's Cathedral in *Stones of Venice*, or the reflected glories of nature in *Præterita*, or the contrast between Salisbury towers and Giotto's campanile in *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, and see there descriptive eloquence at its best. That this superb eloquence was devoted not to personal or party ends, but to winning men to the love of beauty and truth and right living, is the secret of Ruskin's high place in English letters and of his enduring influence on English life.

**Summary.** The age of Victoria (1837-1901) approaches our own so closely that it is still difficult to form an accurate judgment of its history or literature. In a review of the history of the age we noted three factors, democracy, science, imperialism, which have profoundly influenced English letters from 1850 to the present time.

Our study of Victorian literature includes (1) The life and works of the two greater poets of the age, Tennyson and Browning. (2) The work of Elizabeth Barrett, Matthew Arnold, Rossetti, Morris and Swinburne, who were selected from the two hundred representative poets of the period. (3) The life and the chief works of the major novelists, Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot. (4) A review of some other novelists of the age, the Brontë Sisters, Mrs. Gaskell, Anthony Trollope, Blackmore, Kingsley, Meredith, Hardy and Stevenson. (5) The typical essayists and historians, Macaulay, Carlyle, Ruskin, with a review of other typical groups of writers in the fields of religion, history and science.

**Selections for Reading.** Typical selections from all authors named in the text are found in Manly, English Poetry, English Prose; Pancoast, Standard English Poems, Standard English Prose; and several other collections, which are especially useful in a study of the minor writers. The

works of the major authors may be read to much better advantage in various inexpensive editions prepared for school use. Only a few such editions are named below for each author, but a fairly complete list is given under Texts in the General Bibliography.

Tennyson's selected minor poems, *Idylls of the King*, *The Princess* and *In Memoriam*, in Standard English Classics, Riverside Literature, Pocket Classics, Silver Classics. A good volume containing the best of Tennyson's poems in *Athenæum Press Series*.

Browning and Mrs. Browning, selected poems in Standard English Classics, Lake Classics, English Readings, Belles Lettres Series.

Matthew Arnold, selected poems in Golden Treasury Series, Maynard's English Classics; *Sohrab and Rustum* in Standard English Classics; prose selections in English Readings, Academy Classics.

Dickens, *Tale of Two Cities*, *David Copperfield*, *Christmas Carol* in Standard English Classics, Lake Classics; other novels in Everyman's Library.

Thackeray, *Henry Esmond* in Standard English Classics, Pocket Classics; *English Humorists* in Lake Classics, English Readings; other works in Everyman's Library.

George Eliot, *Silas Marner*, in Standard English Classics, Riverside Literature; *Mill on the Floss* and other novels in Everyman's Library.

Blackmore's *Lorna Doone* and Mrs. Gaskell's *Cranford* in Standard English Classics. Readé's *Cloister and the Hearth*, Kingsley's *Westward Ho* and *Hypatia* in Everyman's Library.

Macaulay, selected essays in Standard English Classics, Riverside Literature, Lake Classics.

Carlyle, *Essay on Burns* in Standard English Classics, Academy Classics; *Heroes and Hero Worship* in *Athenæum Press*, Pocket Classics; *French Revolution* in Everyman's Library.

Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* and selected essays and letters in Standard English Classics; selections from Ruskin's art books in Riverside Literature; other works in Everyman's Library.

**Bibliography.** The works named below are selected from a large list dealing with the Victorian age chiefly. For more extended works see the General Bibliography.

**History.** McCarthy, *History of Our Own Times* and *The Epoch of Reform*. Oman, *England in the Nineteenth Century*; Lee, *Queen Victoria*; Bryce, *Studies in Contemporary Biography*.

**Literature.** Saintsbury, *History of Nineteenth Century Literature*; Harrison, *Studies in Early Victorian Literature*; Mrs. Oliphant, *Literary History of England in the Nineteenth Century*; Walker, *The Age of Tennyson*; Morley, *Literature of the Age of Victoria*; Stedman, *Victorian Poets*; Brownell, *Victorian Prose Masters*.

*Tennyson.* Life, by Lyall (English Men of Letters Series), by Horton; Alfred Lord Tennyson, a Memoir by his Son. Napier, Homes and Haunts of Tennyson; Andrew Lang, Alfred Tennyson; Dixon, A Tennyson Primer; Sneath, The Mind of Tennyson; Van Dyke, The Poetry of Tennyson. Essays by Harrison, in Tennyson, Ruskin, Mill and Other Literary Estimates; by Stedman, in Victorian Poets; by Hutton, in Literary Essays; by Dowden, in Studies in Literature; by Forster, in Great Teachers; by Gates, in Studies and Appreciations.

*Browning.* Life, by Sharp (Great Writers Series), by Chesterton (E. M. of L.). Alexander, Introduction to Browning (Ginn and Company); Corson, Introduction to the Study of Browning; Phelps, Browning: How to Know Him; Symonds, Introduction to the Study of Browning; Brooke, Poetry of Robert Browning; Harrington, Browning Studies. Essays by Stedman, Dowden, Hutton, Forster.

*Dickens.* Life, by Forster, by Ward (E. M. of L.), by Marzials. Gissing, Charles Dickens; Chesterton, Charles Dickens; Kitton, Novels of Dickens. Essays by Harrison, Bagehot; A. Lang, in Gadshill edition of Dickens's works.

*Thackeray.* Life, by Merivale and Marzials, by Trollope (E. M. of L.). Crowe, Homes and Haunts of Thackeray. Essays, by Brownell, in English Prose Masters; by Lilly, in Four English Humorists; by Harrison, in Studies in Early Victorian Literature; by Scudder, in Social Ideals in English Letters.

*George Eliot.* Life, by L. Stephen (E. M. of L.), by O. Browning, by Cross. Cooke, George Eliot: a Critical Study of her Life and Writings. Essays by Brownell, Harrison, Dowden, Hutton.

*Macaulay.* Life, by Trevelyan, by Morrison (E. M. of L.). Essays by L. Stephen, Bagehot, Saintsbury, Harrison, M. Arnold.

*Carlyle.* Life, by Garnett, by Nichol (E. M. of L.), by Froude. Carlyle's Letters and Reminiscences, edited by Norton. Craig, The Making of Carlyle. Essays by Lowell, Brownell, Hutton, Harrison.

*Ruskin.* Life, by Harrison (E. M. of L.), by Collingwood. Ruskin's *Præterita* (autobiography). Mather, Ruskin, his Life and Teaching; Cooke, Studies in Ruskin; Waldstein, The Work of John Ruskin; W. M. Rossetti, Ruskin, Rossetti and Pre-Raphaelitism. Essays by Brownell, Saintsbury, Forster, Harrison.

## GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books dealing with individual authors and with special periods of English literature are listed in the various chapter endings of this history. Following are some of the best works for general reference, for extended study and for supplementary reading.

**History.** A brief, trustworthy textbook of history, such as Cheyney's *Short History of England* (Ginn and Company) or Gardiner's *Student's History* (Longmans), should always be at hand in studying English literature. More detailed works are Traill, *Social England*, 6 vols. (Putnam); Bright, *History of England*, 5 vols. (Longmans); Green, *History of the English People*, 4 vols. (Harper); Green, *Short History of the English People*, revised edition, 1 vol. (American Book Co.); latest revision of Green's *Short History*, with appendix of recent events to 1900, in *Everyman's Library* (Putnam); Kendall, *Source Book of English History* (Macmillan); Colby, *Selections from the Sources of English History* (Longmans); Lingard, *History of England*, to 1688, 10 vols. (a standard Catholic history). Mitchell, *English Lands, Letters and Kings*, 5 vols. (Scribner), a series of pleasant essays of history and literature.

**Literary History.** Cambridge *History of English Literature*, to be completed in 14 vols. (Putnam), by different authors, not always in harmony; *Channels of English Literature* (Dutton) treats of epic, drama, history, essay, novel and other types, each in a separate volume; Jusserand, *Literary History of the English People*, to 1650, 2 vols. (Putnam), a fascinating record; Ten Brink, *English Literature*, to 1550, 3 vols. (Holt), good material, clumsy style; Taine, *English Literature*, 2 vols. (Holt), brilliant but not trustworthy; *Handbooks of English Literature*, 9 vols. (Macmillan); Garnett and Gosse, *Illustrated History of English Literature*, 4 bulky volumes (Macmillan), good for pictures; Nicoll and Seccombe, *History of English Literature*, from Chaucer to end of Victorian era, 3 vols. (Dodd); Morley, *English Writers*, to 1650, 11 vols. (Cassell); Chambers, *Cyclopedia of English Literature*, 3 vols. (Lippincott).

**Biography.** *Dictionary of National Biography*, 63 vols. (Macmillan). *English Men of Letters*, a volume to each author (Macmillan);

briefer series of the same kind are Great Writers (Scribner), Beacon Biographies (Houghton), Westminster Biographies (Small). Allibone, Dictionary of Authors, 5 vols. (Lippincott). Hinchman and Gummere, Lives of Great English Writers (Houghton), offers thirty-eight biographies in a single volume.

**Literary Types.** Courthope, History of English Poetry, 4 vols. (Macmillan); Gummere, Handbook of Poetics (Ginn and Company); Stedman, Nature and Elements of Poetry (Houghton); Saintsbury, History of English Prosody (Macmillan); Alden, Specimens of English Verse (Holt).

Steenstrup, The Mediæval Popular Ballad, translated from the Danish by Edward Cox (Ginn and Company); Gummere, The Popular Ballad (Houghton).

Ward, History of Dramatic Literature, to 1714, 3 vols. (Macmillan); Caffin, Appreciation of the Drama (Baker).

Raleigh, The English Novel (Scribner); Hamilton, Materials and Methods of Fiction (Baker); Cross, Development of the English Novel (Macmillan); Perry, Study of Prose Fiction (Houghton).

Saintsbury, History of Criticism, 3 vols. (Dodd); Gayley and Scott, Introduction to Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism (Ginn and Company); Winchester, Principles of Criticism (Macmillan); Worsfold, Principles of Criticism (Longmans); Moulton, Library of Literary Criticism, 8 vols. (Malkan).

**Essays of Literature.** Bagehot, Literary Studies; Hazlitt, Lectures on the English poets; Lowell, Literary Essays; Mackail, Springs of Helicon (English poets from Chaucer to Milton); Minto, Characteristics of English Poets (Chaucer to Elizabethan dramatists); Matthew Arnold, Essays in Criticism; Leslie Stephen, Hours in a Library; Stevenson, Familiar Studies of Men and Books; Birrell, Obiter Dicta; Hales, Folia Litteraria; Walter Pater, Appreciations; Woodberry, Makers of Literature; Dowden, Studies in Literature and Transcripts and Studies; Gates, Studies in Appreciation; Harrison, The Choice of Books; Bates, Talks on the Study of Literature.

**Collections of Poetry and Prose.** Manly, English Poetry, English Prose, 2 vols., containing selections from all important English authors (Ginn and Company); Newcomer and Andrews, Twelve Centuries of English Poetry and Prose (Scott); Century Readings in English Literature (Century Co.); Pancoast, Standard English Poetry, Standard English Prose, 2 vols. (Holt); Leading English Poets from Chaucer to Browning (Houghton); Oxford Book of English Verse.

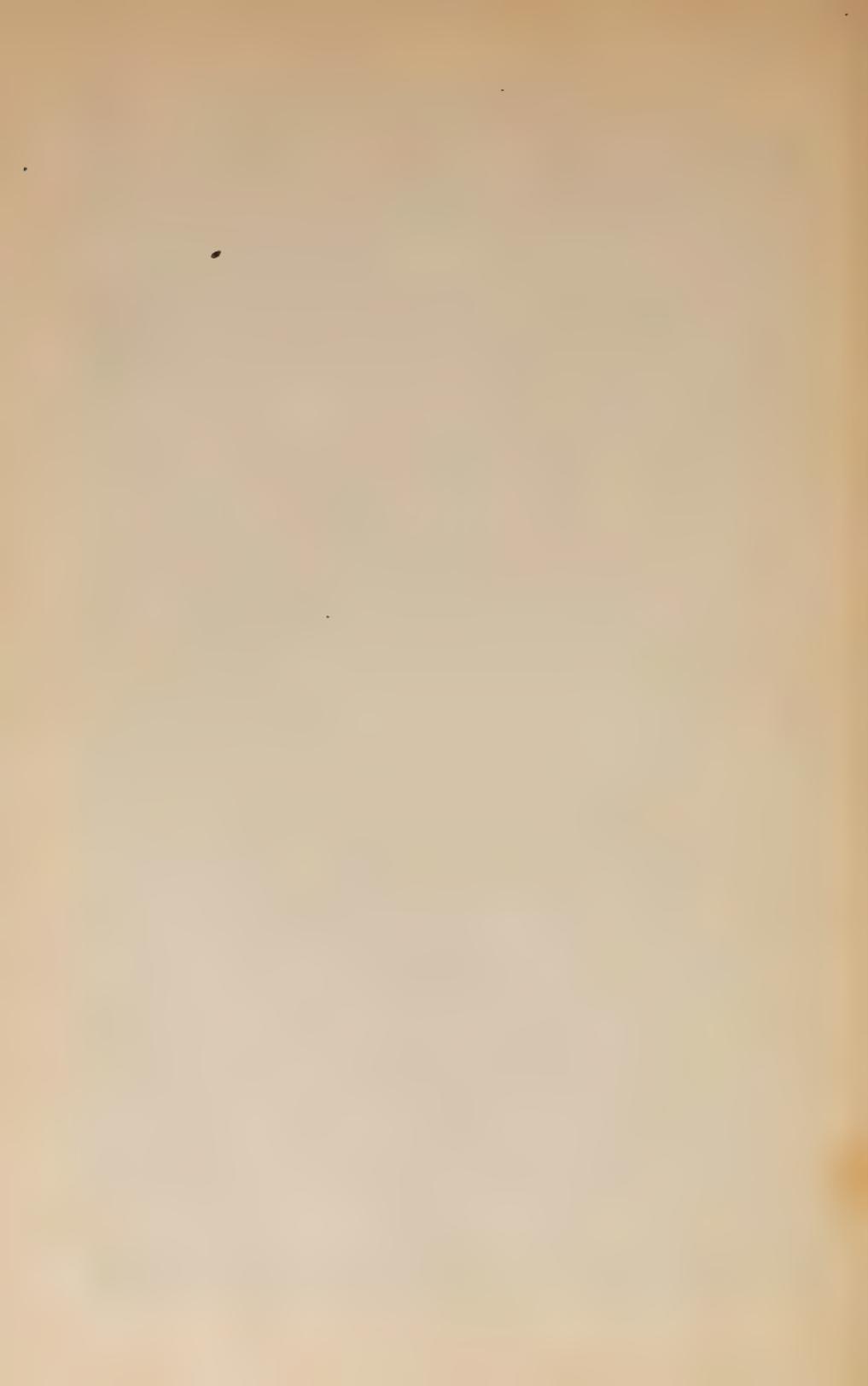
Oxford Treasury of English Literature, 3 vols. (Clarendon Press); Ward, English Poets, 4 vols., and Craik, English Prose Selections, 5 vols. (Macmillan); Morley, Library of English Literature, 5 vols. (Cassell).

**Language.** Lounsbury, History of the English Language (Holt); Emerson, Brief History of the English Language (Macmillan); Welsh, Development of English Language and Literature (Scott); Bradley, Making of English (Macmillan); Greenough and Kittredge, Words and their Ways in English Speech (Macmillan); Anderson, Study of English Words (American Book Co.).

**Miscellaneous.** Classic Myths in English Literature (Ginn and Company); Ryland, Chronological Outlines of English Literature, names and dates only (Macmillan); Raleigh, Style (Longmans); Brewer, Reader's Handbook (Lippincott); Hutton, Literary Landmarks of London (Harper); Boynton, London in English Literature (University of Chicago Press); Dalbiac, Dictionary of English Quotations (Macmillan); Bartlett, Familiar Quotations (Little); Walsh, International Encyclopedia of Quotations (Winston).

**School Texts.**<sup>1</sup> Standard English Classics and Athenæum Press Series (Ginn and Company); Riverside Literature (Houghton); Pocket Classics, Golden Treasury Series (Macmillan); Lake Classics (Scott); Silver Classics (Silver); Longmans' English Classics (Longmans); English Readings (Holt); Maynard's English Classics (Merrill); Caxton Classics (Scribner); Belles Lettres Series (Heath); King's Classics (Luce); Canterbury Classics (Rand); Academy Classics (Allyn); Cambridge Literature (Sanborn); Student's Series (Sibley); Camelot Series (Simmons); Carisbrooke Library (Routledge); World's Classics (Clarendon Press); Lakeside Classics (Ainsworth); Standard Literature (University Publishing Company); Eclectic English Classics (American Book Co.); Cassell's National Library (Cassell); Everyman's Library (Dutton); Morley's Universal Library (Routledge); Bohn Library (Macmillan); Little Masterpieces (Doubleday); Handy Volume Classics (Crowell); Arthurian Romances (Nutt); New Mediæval Library (Duffield); Arber's English Reprints (Macmillan); Mermaid Dramatists (Scribner); Temple Dramatists (Macmillan); Home and School Library, a series of texts prepared for young readers (Ginn and Company).

<sup>1</sup> The chief works of English and American literature are now widely published in inexpensive editions prepared especially for classroom use. Descriptive catalogues of these handy little editions are issued by the various educational publishers.



# OUTLINES OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

## CHAPTER I

### THE PIONEERS AND NATION-BUILDERS

'T was glory once to be a Roman:  
She makes it glory now to be a man.

Bayard Taylor, "America"

We have this double interest in early American literature, that it is our own and unlike any other. The literatures of Europe began with wonder tales of a golden age, with stories of fairy ships, of kings akin to gods, of heroes who ventured into enchanted regions and there waged battle with dragons or the powers of darkness. American literature began with historical records, with letters of love and friendship, with diaries or journals of exploration, with elegiac poems lamenting the death of beloved leaders or hearth companions,—in a word, with the chronicles of human experience. In this respect, of recording the facts and the truth of life as men and women fronted life bravely in the New World, our early literature differs radically from that of any other great nation: it brings us face to face not with myths or shadows but with our ancestors.

**Two Views of the Pioneers.** It has become almost a habit among historians to disparage early American literature, and nearly all our textbooks apologize for it on the ground that the forefathers had no artistic feeling, their souls being oppressed by the gloom and rigor of Puritanism.

Even as we read this apology our eyes rest contentedly upon a beautiful old piece of Colonial furniture, fashioned most artistically by the very men who are pitied for their want of art. We remember also that the Puritans furnished only one of several strong elements in early American life, and that wherever the Puritan influence was strongest there books and literary culture did most abound: their private libraries, for example, make our own appear rather small and trashy by comparison.<sup>1</sup> Cotton Mather, disciplined in the strictest of Puritan homes, wrote his poems in Greek, conducted a large foreign correspondence in Latin, read enormously, published four hundred works, and in thousands of citations proved himself intimate with the world's books of poetry and history, science and religion. That the leaders of the colonies, south and north, were masters of an excellent prose style is evident from their own records; that their style was influenced by their familiarity with the best literature appears in many ways,—in the immense collection of books in Byrd's mansion in Virginia, for instance, or in the abundant quotations that are found in nearly all Colonial writings. Before entering college (and there was never another land with so few people and so many colleges as Colonial America) boys of fourteen passed a classical examination which few graduates would now care to face; and the men of our early legislatures produced state papers which for force of reasoning and lucidity of expression have never been surpassed.

Again, our whole conception of American art may be modified by these considerations: that it requires more genius to build a free state than to make a sonnet, and the Colonists were mighty state-builders; that a ship is a beautiful object,

<sup>1</sup> When Plymouth consisted of a score of cabins and a meetinghouse it had at least two excellent libraries. Bradford had over three hundred books, and Brewster four hundred, consisting of works of poetry, philosophy, science, devotion, and miscellanies covering the entire field of human knowledge. In view of the scarcity of books in 1620, one of these collections, which were common in all the New England settlements, was equivalent to a modern library of thirty or forty thousand volumes.

and American ships with their graceful lines and towering clouds of canvas were once famous the world over; that architecture is a noble art, and Colonial architecture still charms us by its beauty and utility after three hundred years of experimental building. "Art" is a great word, and we use it too narrowly when we apply it to an ode of Shelley or a mutilated statue of Praxiteles, but are silent before a Colonial church or a free commonwealth or the Constitution of the United States.

Instead of an apology for our early literature, therefore, we offer this possible explanation: that our forefathers, who set their faces to one of the most heroic tasks ever undertaken by man, were too busy with great deeds inspired by the ideal of liberty to find leisure for the epic or drama in which the deeds and the ideal should be worthily reflected. They left that work of commemoration to others, and they are still waiting patiently for their poet. Meanwhile we read the straightforward record which they left as their only literary memorial, not as we read the imaginative story of Beowulf or Ulysses, but for the clear light of truth which it sheds upon the fathers and mothers of a great nation.



ENTRANCE TO "WESTOVER," HOME OF  
WILLIAM BYRD

## THE COLONIAL PERIOD (1607-1765)

The Colonial period extends from the first English settlement at Jamestown to the Stamp Act and other measures of "taxation without representation" which tended to unite the colonies and arouse the sleeping spirit of nationality. During this century and a half the Elizabethan dramatists produced their best work; Milton, Bunyan, Dryden and a score of lesser writers were adding to the wealth of English literature; but not a single noteworthy volume crossed the Atlantic to



PLYMOUTH IN 1662. BRADFORD'S HOUSE ON RIGHT

reflect in Europe the lyric of the wilderness, the drama of the commonwealth, the epic of democracy. Such books as were written here dealt largely with matters of religion, government and exploration; and we shall hardly read these books with sympathy, and therefore with understanding, unless we remember two facts: that the Colonists, grown weary of ancient tyranny, were determined to write a new page in the world's history; and that they reverently believed God had called them to make that new page record the triumph of freedom and manhood. Hence the historical impulse and the moral or religious bent of nearly all our early writers.

**Annalists and Historians.** Of the fifty or more annalists of the period we select two as typical of the rest. The first is William Bradford (*cir.* 1590–1657), a noble and learned man, at one time governor of the Plymouth Colony. In collaboration with Winslow he wrote a *Journal* of the *Mayflower's* voyage (long known as *Mourt's Relation*), and he continued this work independently by writing *Of Plimouth Plantation*, a ruggedly sincere history of the trials and triumph of the Pilgrim Fathers. The second annalist is William Byrd (1674–1744), who, a century after Bradford, wrote his *History of the Dividing Line* and two other breezy Journals that depict with equal ease and gayety the southern society of the early days and the march or campfire scenes of an exploring party in the wilderness.

These two writers unconsciously reflected two distinct influences in Colonial

literature, which are epitomized in the words "Puritan" and "Cavalier." Bradford, though a Pilgrim (not a Puritan), was profoundly influenced by the puritanic spirit of his age, with its militant independence, its zeal for liberty and righteousness, its confidence in the divine guidance of human affairs. When he wrote his history, therefore, he was in the mood of one to whom the Lord had said, as to Abraham, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house; and I will make of thee a great nation." Byrd, though born



WILLIAM BYRD

and bred in democratic Virginia, had in him something of the aristocrat. He reminds us of the gay Cavaliers who left England to escape the stern discipline of Cromwell and the triumphant Puritans. When he looked forth upon his goodly plantation, or upon the wilderness with its teeming game, he saw them not with the eyes of prophet or evangelist, but as one who remembered that it was written, "And God saw everything that he had made; and behold it was very good." So he wrote his Journal in an entertaining way, making the best of misfortune, cracking a joke at difficulty or danger, and was well content to reflect this pleasant world without taking it upon his conscience to criticize or reform it.

The same two types of Cavalier and Puritan appear constantly in our own and other literatures as representative of two world-views, two philosophies. Chaucer and Langland were early examples in English poetry, the one with his *Canterbury Tales*, the other with his *Piers Plowman*; and ever since then the same two classes of writers have been reflecting the same life from two different angles. They are not English or American but human types; they appear in every age and in every free nation.

**Colonial Poetry.** There were several recognized poets in Colonial days, and even the annalists and theologians had a rhyming fancy which often broke loose from the bounds of prose. The quantity of Colonial verse is therefore respectable, but the quality of it suffered from two causes: first, the writers overlooked the feeling of their own hearts (the true source of lyric poetry) and wrote of Indian wars, theology and other unpoetic matters; second, they wrote poetry not for its own sake but to teach moral or religious lessons.<sup>1</sup> Thus,

<sup>1</sup> The above criticism applies only to poetry written in English for ordinary readers. At that time many college men wrote poetry in Greek and Latin, and the quality of it compares favorably with similar poetry written in England during the same period. Several specimens of this "scholars' poetry" are preserved in Mather's *Magnalia*; and there is one remarkable poem, in Greek, which was written in Harvard College by an Indian (one of Eliot's "boys") who a few years earlier had been a whooping savage.

the most widely read poem of the period was *The Day of Doom*, which aimed frankly to recall sinners from their evil ways by holding before their eyes the terrors of the last judgment. It was written by Michael Wigglesworth in 1662. This man, who lived a heroic but melancholy life, had a vein of true poetry in him, as when he wrote his "Dear New England, Dearest Land to Me," and from his bed of suffering sent out the call to his people :

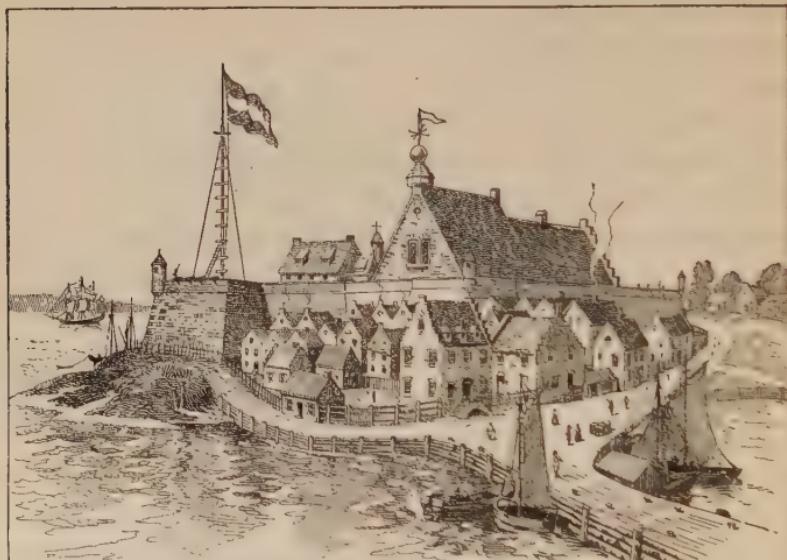
Cheer on, brave souls, my heart is with you all.

But he was too much absorbed in stern theological dogmas to find the beauty of life or the gold of poesie ; and his masterpiece, once prized by an immense circle of readers, seems now a grotesque affair, which might appear even horrible were it not rendered harmless by its jigging, Yankee-Doodle versification.

The most extravagantly praised versifier of the age, and the first to win a reputation in England as well as in America, was Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672), who wrote a book of poems that a London publisher proudly issued under the title of *The Tenth Muse* (1650). The best of Colonial poets was Thomas Godfrey of Philadelphia (1736-1763), whose *Juvenile Poems, with the Prince of Parthia, a Tragedy* contained a few lyrics, odes and pastorals that were different in form and spirit from anything hitherto attempted on this side of the Atlantic. This slender volume was published in 1765, soon after Godfrey's untimely death. With its evident love of beauty and its carefulness of poetic form, it marks the beginning here of artistic literature ; that is, literature which was written to please readers rather than to teach history or moral lessons.

**Nature and Human Nature.** In the literature of the world the two subjects of abiding poetic interest are nature and human nature ; but as these subjects appear in Colonial records they are uniformly prosaic, and the reason is very

simple. Before nature can be the theme of poets she must assume her winsome mood, must "soothe and heal and bless" the human heart after the clamor of politics, the weariness of trade, the cruel strife of society. To read Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" or Bryant's "To a Water-fowl" is to understand the above criticism. But the nature which the Colonists first looked upon seemed wild and strange



NEW AMSTERDAM (NEW YORK) IN 1663

and often terrible. Their somber forests were vast, mysterious, forbidding; and they knew not what perils lurked in them or beyond them. The new climate might give them sunshine or healing rain, but was quite as likely to strike their houses with thunderbolts or harrow their harvests with a cyclone. Meanwhile marauding crows pulled up their precious corn; fierce owls with tufted heads preyed upon their poultry; bears and eagles harried their flocks; the winter wail of the wolf pack or the scream of a hungry panther, sounding through icy, echoless woods, made them shiver in their cabins and draw nearer the blazing fire of pine knots on the hearth.

We can understand, therefore, why there was little poetry of nature in Colonial literature, and why, instead of sonnets to moonbeams or nightingales, we meet quaint and fascinating studies of natural or unnatural history. Such are Josselyn's *New England's Rarities Discovered* and the first part of William Wood's *New England's Prospect*; and such are many chapters of Byrd's *Dividing Line* and other annals that deal with plant or animal life,—books that we now read with pleasure, since the nature that was once wild and strange has become in our eyes familiar and dear.

As for the second subject of poetic interest, human nature, the Colonists had as much of that as any other people; but human nature as it revealed itself in religious controversy, or became a burden in the immigrants that were unloaded on our shores for the relief of Europe or the enrichment of the early transportation companies, as Bradford and Beverley both tell us,—this furnished a vital subject not for poetry but for prose and protest.

The Indians especially, "the wild men" as they were called, slipping out of the shadows or vanishing into mysterious dis-

**The Indians** tances, were a source of anxiety and endless speculation to the early settlers. European writers like Rousseau, who had never seen an Indian or heard a war-whoop, had been industrious in idealizing the savages, attributing to them all manner of noble virtues; and the sentimental attitude of these foreign writers was reflected here, after the eastern Indians had well-nigh vanished, in such stories as Mrs. Morton's *Quabi, or The Virtues of Nature*, a romance in verse which was published in 1790. In the same romantic strain are Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*, Helen Hunt's *Ramona* and some of the early poems of Freneau and Whittier.

The Colonists, on the other hand, had no poetic illusions about the savages. Their enjoyment of this phase of human nature was hardly possible so long as they had to proceed

warily on a forest trail, their eyes keen for the first glimpse of a hideously painted face, their ears alert for the twang of a bowstring or the hiss of a feathered arrow. Their deep but practical interest in the Indians found expression in scores of books, which fall roughly into three groups. In the first are the scholarly works of the heroic John Eliot, "the apostle to the Indians"; of Daniel Gookin also, and of a few others who made careful studies of the language and customs of the various Indian tribes. In the second group are the startling experiences of men and women who were carried away by the savages, leaving slaughtered children and burning homes behind them. Such are Mary Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* and John Williams's *The Redeemed Captive*, both famous in their day, and still of lively interest. In the third group are the fighting stories, such as John Mason's *History of the Pequot War*. The adventures and hairbreadth escapes recorded as sober facts in these narratives were an excellent substitute for fiction during the Colonial period. Moreover, they furnished a motive and method for the Indian tales and Wild West stories which have since appeared as the sands of the sea for multitude.

**Religious Writers.** A very large part of our early writings is devoted to religious subjects, and for an excellent reason; namely, that large numbers of the Colonists came to America to escape religious strife or persecution at home. In the New World they sought religious peace as well as freedom of worship, and were determined to secure it not only for themselves but for their children's children. Hence in nearly all their writings the religious motive was uppermost. Hardly were they settled here, however, when they were rudely disturbed by agitators who fomented discord by preaching each his own pet doctrine or heresy. Presently arose a score of controversial writers; and then Anne Hutchinson, Roger Williams and the early Quakers were disciplined or banished, not because of their faith (for the fact is that all the colonies contained men

of widely different beliefs who lived peaceably together), but because these unbalanced reformers were obstinately bent upon stirring up strife in a community which had crossed three thousand miles of ocean in search of peace.

Of the theological writers we again select two, not because they were typical,—for it is hard to determine who, among the hundred writers that fronted the burning question of religious tolerance, were representative of their age,—but simply because they towered head and shoulders above their contemporaries. These are Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards; the one the most busy man of his age in politics, religion, education and all philanthropic endeavor; the other a profound thinker, who was in the world but not of it, and who devoted the great powers of his mind to such problems as the freedom of the human will and the origin of the religious impulse in humanity.

Cotton Mather (1663-1728) is commonly known by his *Wonders of the Invisible World*, which dealt with the matter of demons and witchcraft; but that is one of the least of his four hundred works, and it has given a wrong impression of the author and of the age in which he lived. His chief work is the *Magnalia Christi Americana, or the Ecclesiastical History of New England* (1702), which is a strange jumble of patriotism and pedantry, of wisdom and foolishness, written in the fantastic style of Robert Burton's



COTTON MATHER

*Anatomy of Melancholy.* The most interesting and valuable parts of this chaotic work are the second and third books, which give us the life stories of Bradford, Winthrop, Eliot, Phipps and many other heroic worthies who helped mightily in laying the foundation of the American republic.

The most famous works of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) are

the so-called *Freedom of the Will* and the *Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections*; but these are hard reading, not to be lightly undertaken. It is from the author's minor and neglected works that one receives the impression that he was a very great and noble man, shackled by a terrible theology. By his scholarship, his rare sincerity, his love of truth, his original mind and his transparent style of writing he exercised probably a greater influence at home and abroad than any other writer of the Colonial era. In Whittier's

poem "The Preacher" there is a tribute to the tender humanity of Edwards, following this picture of his stern thinking :

In the church of the wilderness Edwards wrought,  
Shaping his creed at the forge of thought;  
And with Thor's own hammer welded and bent  
The iron links of his argument,  
Which strove to grasp in its mighty span  
The purpose of God and the fate of man.



JONATHAN EDWARDS

## THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD (1765-1800)

The literary period included in the above term is, in general, the latter half of the eighteenth century; more particularly it extends from the Stamp Act (1765), which united the colonies in opposition to Britain's policy of taxation, to the adoption of the Constitution (1787) and the inauguration of Washington as first president of the new nation.

**Party Literature** The writings of this stormy period reflect the temper of two very different classes who were engaged in constant literary warfare. In the tense years which preceded the Revolution the American people separated into two hostile parties: the Tories, or Loyalists, who supported the mother country; and the Whigs, or Patriots, who insisted on the right of the colonies to manage their own affairs, and who furnished the armies that followed Washington in the War of Independence. Then, when America had won a place among the free nations of the world, her people were again divided on the question of the Constitution. On the one side were the Federalists, who aimed at union in the strictest sense; that is, at a strongly centralized government with immense powers over all its parts. On the other side were the Anti-Federalists, or Antis, who distrusted the monarchical tendency of every centralized government since time began, and who aimed to safeguard democracy by leaving the governing power as largely as possible in the hands of the several states. It is necessary to have these distinctions clearly in mind in reading Revolutionary literature, for a very large part of its prose and poetry reflects the antagonistic aims or ideals of two parties which stood in constant and most bitter opposition.

In general, the literature of the Revolution is dominated by political and practical interests; it deals frankly with this present world, aims to find the best way through its difficulties, and so appears in marked contrast with the theological bent and pervasive "other worldliness" of Colonial writings.

**Benjamin Franklin.** Standing between the two eras, and marking the transition from spiritual to practical interests, is Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), a "self-made" man, who seems well content with his handiwork. During the latter part of his life and for a century after his death he was held up to young Americans as a striking example of practical wisdom and worldly success.



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

The narrative of Franklin's patriotic service belongs to political rather than to literary history; for though his pen was busy for almost seventy years, during which time he produced an immense amount of writing, his end was always very practical rather than æsthetic; that is, he aimed to instruct rather than to please his readers.

Only one of his works is now widely known, the incomplete *Autobiography*, which is in the form of a letter telling a straightforward story of Franklin's early life, of the disadvantages under which he labored and the industry by which he overcame them. For some reason the book has become a "classic" in our literature, and young Americans are urged to read it; though they often show an independent taste by regarding it askance. As an example of what may be accomplished by perseverance, and as a stimulus to industry in the prosaic matter of getting a living, it doubtless has its value;

but one will learn nothing of love or courtesy or reverence or loyalty to high ideals by reading it; neither will one find in its self-satisfied pages any conception of the moral dignity of humanity or of the infinite value of the human soul. The chief trouble with the *Autobiography* and most other works of Franklin is that in them mind and matter, character and reputation, virtue and prosperity, are for the most part hopelessly confounded.

On the other hand, there is a sincerity, a plain directness of style in the writings of Franklin which makes them pleasantly readable. Unlike some other apostles of "common sense" he is always courteous and of a friendly spirit; he seems to respect the reader as well as himself and, even in his argumentative or humorous passages, is almost invariably dignified in expression.

Other works of Franklin which were once popular are the maxims of his *Poor Richard's Almanac*, which appeared annually from 1732 to 1757. These maxims — such as "Light purse, heavy heart," "Diligence is the mother of good luck," "He who waits upon Fortune is never sure of a dinner," "God helps them who help themselves," "Honesty is the best policy," and many others in a similar vein — were widely copied in Colonial and European publications; and to this day they give to Americans abroad a reputation for "Yankee" shrewdness. The best of



FRANKLIN'S SHOP

them were finally strung together in the form of a discourse (the alleged speech of an old man at an auction, where people were complaining of the taxes), which under various titles, such as "The Way to Wealth" and "Father Abraham's Speech," has been translated into every civilized language. Following is a brief selection from which one may judge the spirit of the entire address :

"It would be thought a hard government that should tax its people one tenth part of their time, to be employed in its service; but idleness taxes many of us much more; sloth, by bringing on diseases, absolutely shortens life. Sloth, like rust, consumes faster than labor wears, while 'The used key is always bright,' as Poor Richard says. 'But dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of,' as Poor Richard says. How much more than is necessary do we spend in sleep, forgetting that the sleeping fox catches no poultry, and that there will be sleeping enough in the grave, as Poor Richard says. If time be of all things the most precious, wasting time must be, as Poor Richard says, the greatest prodigality; since, as he elsewhere tells us, 'Lost time is never found again,' and what we call time enough always proves little enough. Let us, then, be up and be doing, and doing to the purpose; so by diligence shall we do more with less perplexity. 'Sloth makes all things difficult, but industry, all easy'; and, 'He that riseth late must trot all day and shall scarce overtake his business at night'; while 'Laziness travels so slowly that Poverty soon overtakes him.' 'Drive thy business, let not that drive thee'; and, 'Early to bed, and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise,' as Poor Richard says."

**Revolutionary Poetry.** The poetry of the Revolution, an abundant but weedy crop, was badly influenced by two factors : by the political strife between Patriots and Loyalists, and by the slavish imitation of Pope and other formalists who were then the models for nearly all versifiers on both sides of the Atlantic. The former influence appears in numerous ballads or narrative poems, which were as popular in the days of Washington as ever they were in the time of Robin Hood. Every important event of the Revolution was promptly celebrated in verse; but as the country was then sharply divided, almost every ballad had a Whig or a Tory twist to it. In consequence we must read two different collections, such as

Moore's *Songs and Ballads of the American Revolution* and Sargent's *Loyalist Poetry of the Revolution*, for supplementary views of the same great struggle.

The influence of Pope and his school is especially noticeable in the work of a group of men called the Hartford **The Hartford Wits** Wits, who at the beginning of our national life had the worthy ambition to create a national literature. Prominent among these so-called wits were Joel Barlow (1754-1812) and Timothy Dwight (1752-1817). In such ponderous works as Barlow's *Columbiad* and Dwight's *Conquest of Canaan*, both written in mechanical rhymed couplets, we have a reflection not of the glories of American history, as the authors intended, but of two aspiring men who, without genius or humor, hoped by industry to produce poems that in size at least should be worthy of a country that stretched between two oceans.

More gifted than either of his fellow "wits" was John Trumbull (1750-1831), who had the instinct of a poet but who was led aside by the strife of Whigs and Tories into the barren field of political satire. His best-known work is *M'Fingal* (1775), a burlesque poem in the doggerel style of Butler's *Hudibras*, which ridiculed a Tory squire and described his barbarous punishment at the hands of a riotous mob of Whigs. It was the most widely quoted poem of the entire Revolutionary period, and is still interesting as an example of rough humor and as a reflection of the militant age in which it was produced.

By far the best poet of the Revolution was Philip Freneau (1752-1832). In his early years he took Milton instead of Pope for his poetic master; then, as his independence increased, he sought the ancient source of all poetry in the feeling of the human heart in presence of nature or human nature. In such poems as "The House of Night," "Indian Burying Ground," "Wild Honeysuckle," "Eutaw Springs," "Ruins of a Country Inn" and a few others in which he speaks from his own heart, he anticipated the work

of Wordsworth, Coleridge and other leaders of what is now commonly known as the romantic revival in English poetry.

When the Revolution drew on apace Freneau abandoned his poetic dream and exercised a ferocious talent for satiric verse in lashing English generals, native Tories, royal proclamations and other matters far removed from poetry. In later years he wrote much prose also, and being a radical and outspoken democrat he became a thorn in the side of Washington and the Federal party. The bulk of his work, both prose and verse, is a red-peppery kind of commentary on the political history of the age in which he lived.



PHILIP FRENEAU

**Orators and Statesmen.**  
For a full century, or from the Stamp Act to the Civil War, oratory was a potent influence in molding our national life; and unlike other influences, which grow by slow degrees, it sprang into vigorous life in the period of intense agitation that preceded the Revolution.

Never before or since has the power of the spoken word been more manifest than during the years when questions of state were debated, not by kings or counselors behind closed doors, but by representative men in open assembly, by farmers and artisans in town halls fronting a village green, by scholarly ministers in the pulpits of churches whose white steeples with their golden vanes spoke silently, ceaselessly, of God and Freedom as the two motives which had inspired the fathers to brave the perils of a savage wilderness.

Among the most famous addresses of the age were the speech of James Otis in the town hall at Boston (1761) and the "Liberty or Death" speech of Patrick Henry to the Virginia burgesses assembled in St. John's church in Richmond (1775). To compare these stirring appeals to patriotism with the parliamentary addresses of a brilliant contemporary, Edmund Burke, is to note a striking difference between English and American oratory of the period, the one charming the ear by its eloquence, the other rousing the will to action like a bugle call.

The statesmen of the Revolution, that glorious band whom Washington led, were also voluminous writers and masters of a clear, forceful style; but it would probably surprise them now to find themselves included in a history of literature. In truth, they hardly belong there; for they wrote not with any artistic impulse to create a work of beauty that should please their readers; their practical aim was to inculcate sound political principles or to move their readers to the right action. If we contrast them with certain of their British contemporaries, with Goldsmith and Burns for example, the truth of the above criticism will be evident. Nevertheless, these statesmen produced a body of so-called citizen literature,



THOMAS JEFFERSON

devoted to the principles and duties of free government, which has never been rivaled in its own field and which is quite as remarkable in its own way as the nature poetry of Bryant or the romances of Cooper or any other purely literary work produced in America.

**Hamilton and Jefferson.** These two statesmen, who became bitter antagonists during the struggle over the Constitution,

may be selected as typical of all the rest. The story of their splendid services in the cause of liberty cannot be told here; such men belong to history rather than to literature; but we may at least note that they deserve more careful and unprejudiced study than rival political parties have thus far given them. Their work has a broad human interest which extends far beyond the borders of America, since they stand for two radically different conceptions of life, one aristocratic, the other democratic, which appear in every age and

explain the political and social divisions among free peoples.

Hamilton (the Federalist) denied the right and the ability of common men to govern themselves; he was the champion of aristocracy, of class privilege, of centralized power in the hands of the few whom he deemed worthy by birth or talent to govern a nation. The most significant trait of Jefferson (the Anti-Federalist) was his lifelong devotion to democracy. He believed in common men, in their ability to choose the



ALEXANDER HAMILTON

right and their purpose to follow it, and he mightily opposed every tendency to aristocracy or class privilege in America. In the struggle over the Constitution he was fearful that the United States government would become monarchical if given too much authority, and aimed to safeguard democracy by leaving the governing power as largely as possible in the hands of the several states. To readers who are not politicians the most interesting thing concerning these two leaders



MONTICELLO, THE HOME OF JEFFERSON IN VIRGINIA

The westward front

is that Hamilton, the champion of aristocracy, was obscurely born and appeared here as a stranger to make his own way by his own efforts; while Jefferson, the uncompromising democrat, came from an excellent Virginia family and was familiar from his youth with aristocratic society.

The best-known work of Hamilton (to which Madison and Jay contributed liberally) is *The Federalist* (1787). This is a typical remarkable series of essays supporting the Constitution and illuminating the principles of union and federation. The one work of Jefferson which will make his name remembered to all ages is the *Declaration of Independence*.

Besides this document, which is less a state paper than a prose chant of freedom, he wrote a multitude of works, a part of which are now collected in ten large volumes. These are known only to historians; but the casual reader will find many things of interest in Jefferson's *Letters*, in his *Autobiography* and in his *Summary View of the Rights of America* (1774). The last-named work gave Burke some information and inspiration for his famous oration "On Conciliation with America" and was a potent influence in uniting the colonies in their struggle for independence.

**Miscellaneous Works.** In the miscellaneous works of the period may be found more pleasurable reading than in the portly volumes that contain the epics of the Hartford Wits or the arguments of Revolutionary statesmen. As a type of the forceful political pamphlet, a weapon widely used in England and America in the eighteenth century, there is nothing equal to Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (1776) and *The Crisis* (1776-1783). The former hastened on the Declaration of Independence; the latter cheered the young Patriots in their struggle to make that Declaration valid in the sight of all nations. Jonathan Carver's *Travels through the Interior Parts of North America* (1778) is an excellent outdoor book dealing with picturesque incidents of exploration in unknown wilds. The letters of Abigail Adams, Eliza Wilkinson and Dolly Madison portray quiet scenes of domestic life and something of the brave, helpful spirit of the mothers of the Revolution. Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) draws charming, almost idyllic, pictures of American life during the Revolutionary period, and incidentally calls attention to the "melting pot," in which people of various races are here fused into a common stock. This mongrel, melting-pot idea (a crazy notion) is supposed to be modern, and has lately occasioned some flighty dramas and novels; but that it is as old as unrestricted immigration appears plainly in one of Crèvecoeur's fanciful sketches:

"What then is the American, this new man? He is either a European or a descendant of a European; hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. *He* is an American who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great Alma Mater.

"Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world. Americans are the western pilgrims, who are carrying along with them that great mass of arts, sciences, vigour and industry which began long since in the East; they will finish the great circle. The Americans were once scattered all over Europe; here they are incorporated into one of the finest systems of population which has ever appeared, and which hereafter will become distinct by the power of the different climate they inhabit. The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas and form new opinions. From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury and useless labour he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence. This is an American."

Finally, there is the *Journal of John Woolman* (1774), written by a gentle member of the society of Friends, which records a spiritual rather than a worldly experience, and which in contrast with the general tumult of Revolutionary literature is as a thrush song in the woods at twilight. It is a book for those who can appreciate its charm of simplicity and sincerity; but the few who know it are inclined to prize it far above the similar work of Franklin, and to unite with Channing in calling it "the sweetest and purest autobiography in the English language."

**Beginning of American Fiction.** Those who imagine that American fiction began with Irving or Cooper or Poe, as is sometimes alleged, will be interested to learn of Susanna Rowson (daughter of an English father and an American mother), whose later stories, at least, belong to our literature. In 1790 she published *Charlotte Temple*, a romance that was immensely popular in its own day and that has proved far

more enduring than any modern "best seller." During the next century the book ran through more than one hundred editions, the last appearing in 1905; and from first to last it has had probably more readers than any novel of Scott or Cooper or Dickens. The reception of this work indicates the widespread interest in fiction here in the late eighteenth century. Moreover, as there were then two types of fiction in

England, the sentimentalism of Richardson and the realism of Fielding, so in America the gushing romances of Mrs. Rowson were opposed by the *Female Quixotism* and other alleged realistic stories of Tabitha Tenney. Both schools of fiction had here their authors and their multitudinous readers while Irving and Cooper were learning their alphabet and Poe was yet unborn.

Into the crude but hopeful beginnings of American fiction we shall not enter, for the simple reason that our earliest romances are hardly worth the time or patience of any but historical students. At the close of

the Revolutionary period, however, appeared a writer whom we may call with some justice the first American novelist. This was Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810), who is worthy to be remembered on three counts: he was the first in this country to follow literature as a profession; he chose American rather than foreign heroes, and pictured them against an American background; and finally, his use of horrible or grotesque incidents was copied by Poe, his Indian adventures



CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

suggested a fruitful theme to Cooper, and his minute analysis of motives and emotions was carried out in a more artistic way by Hawthorne. Hence we may find in Brown's neglected works something of the material and the method of our three greatest writers of fiction.

The six romances of Brown are all dominated by the motive of horror, and are modeled on the so-called Gothic novel with **The Motive of Horror** its sentimental heroine, its diabolical villain, its ghastly mystery, its passages of prolonged agony. If we ask why an American writer should choose this bizarre type, the answer is that agonizing stories were precisely what readers then wanted, and Brown depended upon his stories for his daily bread. At the present time a different kind of fiction is momentarily popular; yet if we begin one of Brown's bloodcurdling romances, the chances are that we shall finish it, since it appeals to that strange interest in morbid themes which leads so many to read Poe or some other purveyor of horrors and mysteries. *Wieland* (1798) is commonly regarded as the best of Brown's works, but is too grotesque and horrible to be recommended. *Edgar Huntley* (1801), with its Indian adventures depicted against a background of wild nature, is a little more wholesome, and may serve very well as a type of the romances that interested readers a century or more ago.

**Summary.** The Colonial period covers the century and a half from the settlement of Jamestown, in 1607, to the Stamp Act of 1765. The literature of this early age shows two general characteristics, one historical, the other theological. The Colonists believed that they were chosen by God to establish a new nation of freemen; hence their tendency to write annals and to preserve every document that might be of use to the future republic. Moreover, they were for the most part religious men and women; they aimed to give their children sound education and godly character; hence their insistence on schools and universities (seven colleges were quickly founded in the wilderness) for the training of leaders of the people; hence also the religious note which sounds through nearly all their writing.

In our review of the Colonial period we noted four classes of writers: (1) The annalists and historians, of whom Bradford and Byrd were selected as typical of two classes of writers who appear constantly in our own and

other literatures. (2) The poets, of whom Wigglesworth, Anne Bradstreet and Godfrey are the most notable. (3) A few characteristic books dealing with nature and the Indians, which served readers of those days in the place of fiction. (4) Theological writers, among whom Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards are the most conspicuous.

The Revolutionary period extends from 1765 to the close of the century. A large part of the literature of this period deals, in the early years, with the strife of Loyalists and Patriots or, in the later years, with the wordy wars of Federalists and Anti-Federalists. These are the political parties into which America was divided by the Revolution and by the question of the Constitution. In general, Revolutionary writing has a practical bent, in marked contrast with the theological spirit of Colonial writing.

Our study of Revolutionary literature includes: (1) Benjamin Franklin, who marks the transition from Colonial to Revolutionary times, from spiritual to worldly interests. (2) Revolutionary poetry, with its numerous ballads and political satires; the effort of the Hartford Wits to establish a national literature; and the work of Philip Freneau, who was a romantic poet at heart, but who was led aside by the strife of the age into political and satiric writing. (3) Orators and statesmen, of whom Otis and Henry, Hamilton and Jefferson were selected as typical. (4) Miscellaneous writers, such as Paine, Crèvecoeur, Carver, Abigail Adams and John Woolman, who reflected the life of the times from various angles. (5) Charles Brockden Brown, and the beginning of American fiction.

**Selections for Reading.** Typical selections in Cairns, *Selections from Early American Writers*; Trent and Wells, *Colonial Prose and Poetry*; Stedman and Hutchinson, *Library of American Literature*, and other anthologies (see "Selections" in the General Bibliography). A convenient volume containing a few selections from every important American author is Calhoun and MacAlarney, *Readings from American Literature* (Ginn and Company).

Bradford's *Of Plimoth Plantation* and John Smith's *Settlement of Virginia*, in Maynard's *Historical Readings*. *Chronicles of the Pilgrims*, in *Everyman's Library*. Various records of early American history and literature, in *Old South Leaflets* (*Old South Meeting House, Boston*). Franklin's *Autobiography*, in *Standard English Classics*, Holt's *English Readings* and several other school editions (see "Texts" in General Bibliography). *Poor Richard's Almanac*, in *Riverside Literature*. *The Federalist* and *Letters from an American Farmer*, in *Everyman's Library*. *Woolman's Journal*, in *Macmillan's Pocket Classics*.

**Bibliography.** For reference works covering the entire field of American history and literature see the General Bibliography. The following works deal with the Colonial and Revolutionary periods.

**History.** Fisher, The Colonial Era; Thwaite, The Colonies; Fiske, Old Virginia and her Neighbors, Beginnings of New England, Dutch and Quaker Colonies in America.

Winsor, Handbook of the Revolution; Sloane, French War and the Revolution; Fisher, Struggle for American Independence; Fiske, A Critical Period of American History; Hart, Formation of the Union.

Studies of social life in Earle, Home Life in Colonial Days; Fisher, Men, Women and Manners of Colonial Times; Crawford, Romantic Days in the Early Republic.

**Literature.** Tyler, History of American Literature, 1607-1765, and Literary History of the Revolution; Sears, American Literature of the Colonial and National Periods; Marble, Heralds of American Literature (a few Revolutionary authors); Patterson, Spirit of the American Revolution as Revealed in the Poetry of the Period; Loshe, The Early American Novel (includes a study of Charles Brockden Brown).

Life of Franklin, by Bigelow, 3 vols., by Parton, 2 vols., by McMaster, by Morse, etc. Lives of other Colonial and Revolutionary worthies in American Statesmen, Makers of America, Cyclopedias of American Biography, etc. (see "Biography" in General Bibliography).

**Fiction.** A few historical novels dealing with Colonial times are: Cooper, Satanstoe, The Red Rover; Kennedy, Rob of the Bowl; Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter; Motley, Merry Mount; Cooke, The Virginia Comedians; Carruthers, Cavaliers of Virginia; Austin, Standish of Standish; Barr, The Black Shilling; Mary Johnston, To Have and to Hold.

Novels with a Revolutionary setting are: Cooper, The Spy, The Pilot; Simms, The Partisan, Katherine Walton; Kennedy, Horseshoe Robinson; Winthrop, Edwin Brothertoft; Eggleston, A Carolina Cavalier; Maurice Thompson, Alice of Old Vincennes; Mitchell, Hugh Wynne; Churchill, Richard Carvel; Gertrude Atherton, The Conqueror.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE OF THE NEW NATION (1800-1840)

Behind him lay the gray Azores,  
Behind, the gates of Hercules ;  
Before him not the ghost of shores,  
Before him only shoreless seas.  
The good mate said, " Now must we pray,  
For lo ! the very stars are gone :  
Brave Admiral, speak ; what shall I say ? "  
" Why say, ' Sail on ! sail on ! and on ! ' "

Joaquin Miller, " Columbus "

**Historical Background.** It was in the early part of the nineteenth century that America began to be counted among the great nations of the world, and it was precisely at that time that she produced her first national literature, a literature so broadly human that it appealed not only to the whole country but to readers beyond the sea. Irving, Cooper and Bryant are commonly regarded as the first notable New World writers ; and we may better understand them and their enthusiastic young contemporaries if we remember that they " grew up with the country " ; that they reflected life at a time when America, having won her independence and emerged from a long period of doubt and struggle, was taking her first confident steps in the sun and becoming splendidly conscious of her destiny as a leader among the world's free people.

Indeed, there was good reason for confidence in those early days ; for never had a young nation looked forth upon a more **National Enthusiasm** heartening prospect. The primitive hamlets of Colonial days had been replaced by a multitude of substantial towns, the somber wilderness by a prosperous farming country. The power of a thousand rivers was turning the

wheels of as many mills or factories, and to the natural wealth of America was added the increase of a mighty commerce with other nations. By the Louisiana Purchase and the acquisition of Florida her territory was vastly increased, and still her sturdy pioneers were pressing eagerly into more spacious lands beyond the Mississippi. Best of all, this enlarging nation, once a number of scattered colonies holding each to its own course, was now the Union ; her people were as one in their patriotism, their loyalty, their intense conviction that the brave New World experiment in free government, once scoffed at as an idle dream, was destined to a glorious future. American democracy was not merely a success ; it was an amazing triumph. Moreover, this democracy, supposed to be the weakest form of government, had already proved its power ; it had sent its navy abroad to humble the insolent Barbary States, and had measured the temper of its soul and the strength of its arm in the second war with Great Britain.

In fine, the New World had brought forth a hopeful young giant of a nation ; and its hopefulness was reflected, with more of zeal than of art, in the prose and poetry of its literary men. Just as the enthusiastic Elizabethan spirit reflected itself in lyric or drama after the defeat of the Armada, so the American spirit seemed to exult in the romances of Cooper and Simms ; in the verse of Pinckney, Halleck, Drake and Percival ; in a multitude of national songs, such as "The American Flag," Warren's Address, "Home Sweet Home" and "The Star-Spangled Banner." We would not venture to liken one set of writings to the other, for we should be on the weak side of an Elizabethan comparison ; we simply note that a great national enthusiasm was largely responsible for the sudden appearance of a new literature in the one land as in the other.

**Literary Environment.** In the works of four writers, Irving, Cooper, Bryant and Poe, we have the best that the early national period produced ; but we shall not appreciate these writers until we see them, like pines in a wood, lifting their

heads over numerous companions, all drawing their nourishment from the same soil and air. The growth of towns and cities in America had led to a rapid increase of newspapers, magazines and annuals (collections of contemporary prose and verse), which called with increasing emphasis for poems, stories, essays, light or "polite" literature. The rapid growth of the nation set men to singing the old psalm of *Sursum Corda*, and every man and woman who felt the impulse added his story or his verse to the national chorus. When the first attempt at a summary of American literature was made in 1837, the author, Royal Robbins, found more than two thousand living writers demanding his attention.

It was due, one must think, to geography rather than to any spirit of sectionalism, to difficulty of travel between the larger

**Knickerbocker School** towns rather than to any difference of aim or motive, that the writers of this period associated themselves in a number of so-called schools or literary centers. New York, which now offered a better field for literary work than Boston or Philadelphia, had its important group of writers called the Knickerbocker School, which included Fitz-Greene Halleck and Joseph Rodman Drake, both poets and cheerful satirists of New World society; the versatile Nathaniel Parker Willis, writer of twenty volumes of poems, essays, stories and sketches of travel; and James Kirke Paulding, also a voluminous writer, who worked with Irving in the *Salmagundi* essays and whose historical novels, such as *The Dutchman's Fireside* (1831), are still mildly interesting.<sup>1</sup>

In the South was another group of young writers, quite as able and enthusiastic as their northern contemporaries. Among these we note especially William Gilmore Simms (1806-1870), whose *Yemassee*, *Border Beagles*, *Katherine Walton* and many

<sup>1</sup> Irving, Cooper and Bryant are sometimes classed among the Knickerbockers; but the work of these major writers is national rather than local or sectional, and will be studied later in detail.

other historical romances of Colonial and Revolutionary days were of more than passing interest. He was a high-minded **Southern Writers** and most industrious writer, who produced over forty volumes of poems, essays, biographies, histories and tales; but he is now remembered chiefly by his novels, which won him the title of "the Cooper of the South." At least one of his historical romances should be read, partly for its own sake and partly for a comparison with Cooper's work in the same field. Thus

*The Yemassee* (1835), dealing with frontier life and Indian warfare, may be read in connection with Cooper's *The Deerslayer* (1841), which has the same general theme; or *The Partisan* (1835), dealing with the bitter struggle of southern Whigs and Tories during the Revolution, may well be compared with Cooper's *The Spy* (1821), which depicts the same struggle in a northern environment.

Other notable writers of the South during this period were Richard Henry Wilde the poet, now remembered by the song (from an unfinished opera) beginning, "My life is like the summer rose"; William Wirt, the essayist and biographer; and John Pendleton Kennedy, writer of essays and stories which contain many charming pictures of social life in Virginia and Maryland in the days "before the war."

In New England was still another group, who fortunately avoided the name of any school. Sparks, Prescott, Ticknor, Story, Dana,—the very names indicate how true was Boston to her old scholarly traditions. Meanwhile Connecticut had



WILLIAM GILMORE SIMMS

its popular poet in James Gates Percival; Maine had its versatile John Neal; and all the northern states were reading

**New England and the West** the "goody goody" books of Peter Parley (Samuel Goodrich), the somewhat Byronic *Zophiel* and other emotional poems of Maria Gowen Brooks (whom Southey called "Maria del Occidente"), and the historical romances of Catherine Sedgwick and Sarah Morton.



JOHN PENDLETON KENNEDY

The West also (everything beyond the Alleghenies was then the West) made its voice heard in the new literature. Timothy Flint wrote a very interesting *Journal* from his missionary experiences, and a highly colored romance from his expansive imagination; and James Hall drew some vigorous and sympathetic pictures of frontier life in *Letters from the West*, *Tales of the Border* and *Wilderness and Warpath*.

There are many other writers who won recognition before 1840, but those we have named are more than enough; for each name is an invitation, and invitations when numerous are simply bothersome. For example, the name of Catherine Sedgwick invites us to read *Hope Leslie* and *The Linwoods*, both excellent in their day, and still interesting as examples of the novels that won fame less than a century ago; or the name of Kennedy leads us to *Swallow Barn* (alluring title!) with its bright pictures of Virginia life, and to *Horseshoe Robinson*, a crude but stirring tale of Revolutionary heroism. The point in naming these minor writers,

once as popular as any present-day favorite, is simply this: that the major authors, whom we ordinarily study as typical of the age, were not isolated figures but part of a great romantic movement in literature; that they were influenced on the one hand by European letters, and on the other by a host of native writers who were all intent on reflecting the expanding life of America in the early part of the nineteenth century.

### WASHINGTON IRVING (1783-1859)

A very pleasant writer is Irving, a man of romantic and somewhat sentimental disposition, but sound of motive, careful of workmanship, invincibly cheerful of spirit. The genial quality of his work may be due to the fact that from joyous boyhood to serene old age he did very much as he pleased, that he lived in what seemed to him an excellent world and wrote with no other purpose than to make it happy. In summarizing his career an admirer of Irving is reminded of what the Book of Proverbs says of wisdom: "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

The historian sees another side of Irving's work. Should it be asked, "What did he do that had not been as well or The Man and his Times better done before him?" the first answer is that the importance of any man's work must be measured by the age in which he did it. A schoolboy now knows more about electricity than ever Franklin learned; but that does not detract from our wonder at Franklin's kite. So the work of Irving seems impressive when viewed against the gray literary dawn of a century ago. At that time America had done a mighty work for the world politically, but had added little of value to the world's literature. She read and treasured the best books; but she made no contribution to their number, and her literary impotence galled her sensitive spirit. As if to make up for her failure, the writers of the Knickerbocker, Charleston and other "schools" praised each

other's work extravagantly; but no responsive echo came from overseas, where England's terse criticism of our literary effort was expressed in the scornful question, "Who reads an American book?"

Irving answered that question effectively when his *Sketch Book*, *Bracebridge Hall* and *Tales of a Traveller* found a multitude of delighted readers on both sides of the Atlantic. His graceful style was hardly rivaled by any other writer of

the period; and England, at a time when Scott and Byron were playing heroic parts, welcomed him heartily to a place on the literary stage. Thus he united the English and the American reader in a common interest and, as it were, charmed away the sneer from one face, the resentment from the other. He has been called "father of our American letters" for two reasons: because he was the first to win a lasting literary reputation at home and abroad, and



WASHINGTON IRVING

because of the formative influence which his graceful style and artistic purpose have ever since exerted upon our prose writers.

**Life.** Two personal characteristics appear constantly in Irving's work: the first, that he was always a dreamer, a romance seeker; the second, that he was inclined to close his eyes to the heroic present and open them wide to the glories, real or imaginary, of the remote past. Though he lived in an American city in a day of mighty changes and discoveries, he was far less interested in the modern New York than in the ancient New Amsterdam; and though he was in Europe

at the time of the Napoleonic wars, he apparently saw nothing of them, being then wholly absorbed in the battles of the long-vanished Moors. Only once, in his books of western exploration, did he seriously touch the vigorous life of his own times; and critics regard these books as the least important of all his works.

He was born in New York (1783) when the present colossal city was a provincial town that retained many of its quaint Dutch characteristics. Over all the straggling town, from the sunny

**Boyhood**      Battery with its white-winged ships to the Harlem woods where was good squirrel shooting, Irving rambled at ease on many a day when the neighbors said he ought to have been at his books. He was the youngest of the family; his constitution was not rugged, and his gentle mother was indulgent. She would smile when he told of reading a smuggled copy of the *Arabian Nights* in school, instead of his geography; she was silent when he slipped away from family prayers to climb out of his bedroom window and go to the theater, while his sterner father thought of him as sound asleep in his bed.

Little harm came from these escapades, for Irving was a merry lad with no meanness in him; but his schooling was sadly neglected. His brothers had graduated from Columbia; but on the plea of delicate health he abandoned the idea of college, with a sigh in which there was perhaps as much satisfaction as regret. At sixteen he entered a law office, where he gave less time to studying Blackstone than to reading novels and writing skits for the newspapers.

This happy indifference to work and learning, this disposition to linger on the sunny side of the street, went with Irving through life.

**Finding Himself**      Experimentally he joined his brothers, who were in the hardware trade; but when he seemed to be in danger of consumption they sent him to Europe, where he enjoyed himself greatly, and whence he returned perfectly well. Next he was sent on business to England; and there, when the Irving Brothers failed, their business having been ruined by the War of 1812, Irving manfully resolved to be no longer a burden on others and turned to literature for his support. With characteristic love of doing what he liked he refused a good editorial position (which Walter Scott obtained for him) and busied himself with his *Sketch Book* (1820). This met with a generous welcome in England and America, and it was followed by the equally popular *Bracebridge Hall* and *Tales of a Traveller*. By these three works Irving was assured not only of literary fame but, what was to him of more consequence, of his ability to earn his living.

Next we find him in Spain, whither he went with the purpose of translating Navarrete's *Voyages of Columbus*, a Spanish book, in which **Life Abroad** he saw a chance of profit from his countrymen's interest in the man who discovered America. Instead of translating another man's work, however, he wrote his own *Life and Times of Columbus* (1828). The financial success of this book (which is still our most popular biography of the great explorer) enabled Irving to live comfortably in Spain, where he read diligently and accumulated the material for his later works on Spanish history.



"SUNNYSIDE," HOME OF IRVING

By this time Irving's growing literary fame had attracted the notice of American politicians, who rewarded him with an appointment as secretary of the legation at London. This pleasant office he held for two years, but was less interested in it than in the reception which English men of letters generously offered him. Then he apparently grew homesick, after an absence of seventeen years, and returned to his native land, where he was received with the honor due to a man who had silenced the galling question, "Who reads an American book?"

The rest of Irving's long life was a continued triumph. Amazed at first, and then a little stunned by the growth, the hurry, the onward surge of his country, he settled back into the restful past, and was heard with the more pleasure by his countrymen because he seemed to speak to them from a vanished age. Once, inspired by the tide of

life sweeping into the West, he journeyed beyond the Mississippi and found material for his pioneering books; but an active life was far from his taste, and presently he built his house "Sunnyside" (appropriate name) at Tarrytown on the Hudson. There he spent the remainder of his days, with the exception of four years in which he served the nation as ambassador to Spain. This honor, urged upon him by Webster and President Tyler, was accepted with characteristic modesty not as a personal reward but as a tribute which America had been wont to offer to the profession of letters.

**Chief Works of Irving.** A good way to form a general impression of Irving's works is to arrange them chronologically in five main groups. The first, consisting of the *Salmagundi* essays, the *Knickerbocker History* and a few other trifles, we may call the Oldstyle group, after the pseudonym assumed by the author.<sup>1</sup> The second or Sketch-Book group includes the *Sketch Book*, *Bracebridge Hall* and *Tales of a Traveller*. The third or Alhambra group, devoted to Spanish and Moorish themes, includes *The Conquest of Granada*, *Spanish Voyages of Discovery*, *The Alhambra* and certain similar works of a later period, such as *Moorish Chronicles* and *Legends of the Conquest of Spain*. The fourth or Western group contains *A Tour on the Prairies*, *Astoria* and *Adventures of Captain Bonneville*. The fifth or Sunnyside group is made up chiefly of biographies, *Oliver Goldsmith*, *Mahomet and his Successors* and *The Life of Washington*. Besides these are some essays and stories assembled under the titles of *Spanish Papers* and *Wolfert's Roost*.

The *Salmagundi* papers and others of the Oldstyle group would have been forgotten long ago if anybody else had written them. In other words, our interest in them is due not to their intrinsic value (for they are all "small potatoes") but to the fact that their author became a famous literary man.

<sup>1</sup> Ever since Revolutionary days it had been the fashion for young American writers to use an assumed name. Irving appeared at different times as "Jonathan Oldstyle," "Diedrich Knickerbocker" and "Geoffrey Crayon, Gent."

Most candid readers would probably apply this criticism also to the *Knickerbocker History*, had not that grotesque joke won an undeserved reputation as a work of humor.

The story of the Knickerbocker fabrication illustrates the happy-go-lucky method of all Irving's earlier work. He had

**Knicker-  
bocker  
History** tired of his *Salmagundi* fooling and was looking for variety when his eyes lighted on Dr. Mitchill's *Picture of New York*, a grandiloquent work written by a prominent member of the Historical Society. In a light-headed moment Irving and his brother Peter resolved to burlesque this history and, in the approved fashion of that day, to begin with the foundation of the world. Then Peter went to Europe on more important business, and Irving went on with his joke alone. He professed to have discovered the notes of a learned Dutch antiquarian who had recently disappeared, leaving a mass of manuscript and an unpaid board-bill behind him. After advertising in the newspapers for the missing man, Irving served notice on the public that the profound value of Knickerbocker's papers justified their publication, and that the proceeds of the book would be devoted to paying the board-bill. Then appeared, in time to satisfy the aroused curiosity of the Historical Society, to whom the book was solemnly dedicated, the *History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty, by Diedrich Knickerbocker* (1809).

This literary hoax made an instant sensation; it was denounced for its scandalous irreverence by the members of the Historical Society, especially by those who had Dutch ancestors, but was received with roars of laughter by the rest of the population. Those who read it now (from curiosity, for its merriment has long since departed, leaving it dull as any thrice-repeated joke) are advised to skip the first two books, which are very tedious fooling, and to be content with an abridged version of the stories of Wouter van Twiller, William the Testy and Peter the Headstrong. These are the names of

real Dutch governors of New Amsterdam, and the dates given are exact dates ; but there history ends and burlesque begins. The combination of fact and nonsense and the strain of gravity in which absurdities are related have led some critics to place the *Knickerbocker History* first in time of the notable works of so-called American humor. That is doubtless a fair classification ; but other critics assert that real humor is as purely human as a smile or a tear, and has therefore no national or racial limitations.

The *Sketch Book*, chief of the second group of writings, is perhaps the best single work that Irving produced. We shall   
**Sketch Book** read it with better understanding if we remember that it was the work of a young man who, having always done as he pleased, proceeds now to write of whatever pleasant matter is close at hand. Being in England at the time, he naturally finds most of his material there ; and being youthful, romantic and sentimental, he colors everything with the hue of his own disposition. He begins by chatting of the journey and of the wide sea that separates him from home. He records his impressions of the beautiful English country, tells what he saw or felt during his visit to Stratford on Avon, and what he dreamed in Westminster Abbey, a place hallowed by centuries of worship and humanized by the presence of the great dead. He sheds a ready tear over a rural funeral, and tries to make us cry over the sorrows of a poor widow ; then to relieve our feelings he pokes a bit of fun at John Bull. Something calls his attention to Isaac Walton, and he writes a Waltonian kind of sketch about a fisherman. In one chapter he comments on contemporary literature ; then, as if not quite satisfied with what authors are doing, he lays aside his record of present impressions, goes back in thought to his home by the Hudson, and produces two stories of such humor, charm and originality that they make the rest of the book appear almost commonplace, as the careless sketches of a painter are forgotten in presence of his inspired masterpiece.

These two stories, the most pleasing that Irving ever wrote, are "Rip van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." They should be read if one reads nothing else of the author's twenty volumes.

The works on Spanish themes appeal in different ways to different readers. One who knows his history will complain (and justly) that Irving is superficial, that he is concerned



RIP VAN WINKLE

with picturesque rather than with important incidents; but one who likes the romance of history, and who reflects that romance **Spanish Themes** plays an important part in the life of any people, will find the legends and chronicles of this Spanish group as interesting as fiction. We should remember, moreover, that in Irving's day the romance of old Spain, familiar enough to European readers, was to most Americans still fresh and wondrous. In emphasizing the romantic or picturesque side of his subject he not only pleased his readers but broadened their horizon; he also influenced a whole generation

of historians who, in contrast with the scientific or prosaic historians of to-day, did not hesitate to add the element of human interest to their narratives.

The most widely read of all the works of the Spanish group is *The Alhambra* (1832). This is, on the surface, a collection of semihistorical essays and tales clustering around the ancient palace, in Granada, which was the last stronghold of the Moors in Europe; in reality it is a record of the impressions and dreams of a man who, finding himself on historic ground, gives free rein to his imagination. At times, indeed, he seems to have his eye on his American readers, who were then in a romantic mood, rather than on the place or people he was describing. The book delighted its first critics, who called it "the Spanish Sketch Book"; but though pleasant enough as a romantic dream of history, it hardly compares in originality with its famous predecessor.

Except to those who like a brave tale of exploration, and who happily have no academic interest in style, Irving's western books are of little consequence. In fact, *Western Stories* they are often omitted from the list of his important works, though they have more adventurous interest than all the others combined. *A Tour on the Prairies*, which records a journey beyond the Mississippi in the days when buffalo were the explorers' mainstay, is the best written of the pioneer books; but the *Adventures of Captain Bonneville*, a story of wandering up and down the great West with plenty of adventures among Indians and "free trappers," furnishes the most excitement. Unfortunately this journal, which vies in interest with Parkman's *Oregon Trail*, cannot be credited to Irving, though it bears his name on the title-page.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The *Adventures* is chiefly the work of a Frenchman, a daring free-rover, who probably tried in vain to get his work published. Irving bought the work for a thousand dollars, revised it slightly, gave it his name and sold it for seven or eight times what he paid for it. In *Astoria*, the third book of the western group, he sold his services to write up the records of the fur house established by John Jacob Astor, and made a poor job of it.

Of the three biographies *Oliver Goldsmith* (1849) is the best, probably because Irving had more sympathy and affinity with the author of "The Deserted Village" than **Biographies** with Mahomet or Washington. The *Life of Washington* (1855-1859) was plainly too large an undertaking for Irving's limited powers; but here again we must judge the work by the standards of its own age and admit



OLD DUTCH CHURCH, SLEEPY HOLLOW

Mentioned by Irving in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"

that it is vastly better than the popular but fictitious biographies of Washington written by Weems and other romancers. Even in Irving's day Washington was still regarded as a demigod; his name was always printed in capitals; and the rash novelist who dared to bring him into a story (as Cooper did in *The Spy*) was denounced for his lack of reverence. In consequence of this false attitude practically all Washington's biographers (with the exception of the judicious Marshall) depicted him as a ponderously dignified creature, stilted, unlovely, unhuman, who must always appear with a halo around his head. Irving was too much influenced by this absurd

fashion and by his lack of scholarship to make a trustworthy book; but he gave at least a touch of naturalness and humanity to our first president, and set a new biographical standard by attempting to write as an honest historian rather than as a mere hero-worshiper.

**An Appreciation of Irving.** The three volumes of the Sketch-Book group and the romantic *Alhambra* furnish an excellent measure of Irving's literary talent. At first glance these books appear rather superficial, dealing with pleasant matters of no consequence; but on second thought pleasant matters are always of consequence, and Irving invariably displays two qualities, humor and sentiment, in which humanity is forever interested. His humor, at first crude and sometimes in doubtful taste (as in his *Knickerbocker History*) grew more refined, more winning in his later works, until a thoughtful critic might welcome it, with its kindness, its culture, its smile in which is no cynicism and no bitterness, as a true example of "American" humor,—if indeed such a specialized product ever existed. His sentiment was for the most part tender, sincere and manly. Though it now seems somewhat exaggerated and at times dangerously near to sentimentality, that may not be altogether a fault; for the same criticism applies to Longfellow, Dickens and, indeed, to most other writers who have won an immense audience by frankly emphasizing, or even exaggerating, the honest sentiments that plain men and women have always cherished both in life and in literature.

The style of Irving, with its suggestion of Goldsmith and Addison (who were his first masters), is deserving of more **Style of Irving** unstinted praise. A "charming" style we call it; and the word, though indefinite, is expressive of the satisfaction which Irving's manner affords his readers. One who seeks the source of his charm may find it in this, that he cherished a high opinion of humanity, and that the friendliness, the sense of comradeship, which he felt for his fellow men was reflected in his writing; unconsciously at first,

perhaps, and then deliberately, by practice and cultivation. In consequence, we do not read Irving critically but sympathetically; for readers are like children, or animals, in that they are instinctively drawn to an author who trusts and understands them.

Thackeray, who gave cordial welcome to Irving, and who called him "the first ambassador whom the New World of letters sent to the Old," was deeply impressed by the fact not that the young American had an excellent prose style but that "his gate was forever swinging to visitors." That is an illuminating criticism; for we can understand the feeling of the men and women of a century ago who, having read the *Sketch Book*, were eager to meet the man who had given them pleasure by writing it. In brief, though Irving wrote nothing of great import, though he entered not into the stress of life or scaled its heights or sounded its deeps, we still read him for the sufficient but uncritical reason that we like him.

In this respect, of winning our personal allegiance, Irving stands in marked contrast to his greatest American contemporary, Cooper. We read the one because we are attracted to the man, the other for the tale he has to tell.

### WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT (1794-1878)

Bryant has been called "the father of American song," and the year 1821, when his first volume appeared, is recorded as the natal year of American poetry. Many earlier singers had won local reputations, but he was the first who was honored in all the states and who attained by his poetry alone a dominating place in American letters.

That was long ago; and times have changed, and poets with them. In any collection of recent American verse one may find poems more imaginative or more finely wrought than any that Bryant produced; but these later singers stand in a company and contribute to an already large collection, while Bryant

stood alone and made a brave beginning of poetry that we may honestly call native and national. Before he won recognition by his independent work the best that our American singers thought they could do was to copy some English original; but after 1821 they dared to be themselves in poetry, as they had ever been in politics. They had the successful Bryant for a model, and the young Longfellow was one of his pupils. Moreover, he stands the hard test of time, and seems to have no successor. He is still our Puritan poet, — a little severe, perhaps, but American to the core, — who reflects better than any other the rugged spirit of that puritanism which had so profoundly influenced our country during the early, formative days of the republic.

**Life.** In the boyhood of Bryant we shall find the inspiration for all his enduring work. He was of

Pilgrim stock, and was born (1794) in the little village of Cummington, in western Massachusetts. There, with the Berkshire Hills and the ancient forest forever in sight, he grew to man's stature, working on the farm or attending the district school by day, and reading before the open fire at night. His father was a physician, a scholarly man who directed his son's reading. His mother was a Puritan, one of those quiet, inspiring women who do their work cheerfully, as by God's grace, and who invariably add some sign or patent of nobility to their sons and daughters. There was also in the home a Puritan grandfather who led the family devotions every evening, and whose



WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

prayers with their rich phraseology of psalm or prophecy were "poems from beginning to end." So said Bryant, who attributed to these prayers his earliest impulse to write poetry.

Between these two influences, nature without and puritanism within, the poet grew up; in their shadow he lived and died; little else of consequence is reflected in the poems that are his best memorial.

The visible life of Bryant lies almost entirely outside the realm of poesie. He was fitted for Williams by country ministers, as was

**The Citizen** customary in that day; but poverty compelled him to

leave college after two brief terms. Then he studied law,

and for nine or ten years practiced his profession doggedly, unwillingly, with many a protest at the chicanery he was forced to witness even in the sacred courts of justice. Grown weary of it at last, he went to

New York, found work in a newspaper office, and after a few years' apprenticeship became editor of *The Evening Post*, a position which he held for more than half a century. His worldly affairs prospered;

he became a "leading citizen" of New York, prominent in the social and literary affairs of a great city; he varied the routine of editorship by trips abroad, by literary or patriotic addresses, by cultivating a

country estate at Long Island. In his later years, as a literary celebrity, he loaned his name rather too freely to popular histories, anthologies and gift books, which better serve their catchpenny purpose if some

famous man can be induced to add "tone" to the rubbish.

And Bryant's poetry? Ah, that was a thing forever apart from his daily life, an almost sacred thing, to be cherished in moments when,

**The Poet** his day's work done, he was free to follow his spirit and

give outlet to the feelings which, as a strong man and a Puritan, he was wont to restrain. He had begun to write poetry in childhood, when his father had taught him the value of brevity or compression and "the difference between poetic enthusiasm and fustian." Therefore he wrote slowly, carefully, and allowed ample time for change of thought or diction. So his early "Thanatopsis" was hidden away for years till his father found and published it, and made Bryant famous in a day. All this at a time when English critics were exalting "sudden inspiration," "sustained effort" and poems "done at one sitting."

Once Bryant had found himself (and the blank verse and simple four-line stanza which suited his talent) he seldom changed, and he never improved. His first little volume, *Poems* (1821), contains some

of his best work. In the next fifty years he added to the size but not to the quality of that volume; and there is little to indicate in such poems as "Thanatopsis" and "The Flood of Years" that the one was written by a boy of seventeen and the other by a sage of eighty. His love of poetry as a thing apart from life is indicated by the fact that in old age, to forget the grief occasioned by the death of his wife, he gave the greater part of six years to a metrical translation of the Greek poet Homer. That he never became a great poet or even fulfilled his early promise is due partly to his natural limitations, no doubt, but more largely to the fact that he gave his time and strength to other things. And a poet is like other men in that he cannot well serve two masters.

**The Poetry of Bryant.** Besides the translation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* there are several volumes of prose to Bryant's credit, but his fame now rests wholly on a single book of original poems. The best of these (the result of fifty years of writing, which could easily be printed on fifty pages) may be grouped in two main classes, poems of death and poems of nature; outside of which are a few miscellaneous pieces, such as "The Antiquity of Freedom," "Planting of the Apple Tree" and "The Poet," in which he departs a little from his favorite themes.

Bryant's poems on death reflect something of his Puritan training and of his personal experience while threatened with Poems of  
Death consumption; they are also indicative of the poetic fashion of his age, which was abnormally given to funereal subjects and greatly influenced by such melancholy poems as Gray's "Elegy" and Young's "Night Thoughts." He began his career with "Thanatopsis" (or "View of Death"), a boyhood piece which astonished America when it was published in 1817, and which has ever since been a favorite with readers. The idea of the poem, that the earth is a vast sepulcher of human life, was borrowed from other poets; but the stately blank verse and the noble appreciation of nature are Bryant's own. They mark, moreover, a new era in American poetry, an original era to replace the long imitative period which had

endured since Colonial times. Other and perhaps better poems in the same group are "The Death of the Flowers," "The Return of Youth" and "Tree Burial," in which Bryant goes beyond the pagan view of death presented in his first work.

That death had a strange fascination for Bryant is evident from his returning again and again to a subject which most young poets avoid. Its somber shadow and unanswered question intrude upon nearly all of his nature pieces; so much so that even his "June" portrays that blithe, inspiring month of sunshine and bird song as an excellent time to die. It is from such poems that one gets the curious idea that Bryant never was a boy, that he was a graybeard at sixteen and never grew any younger.

It is in his poems of nature that Bryant is at his best. Even here he is never youthful, never the happy singer whose *Poems of Nature* heart overflows to the call of the winds; he is rather the priest of nature, who offers a prayer or hymn of praise at her altar. And it may be that his noble "Forest Hymn" is nearer to a true expression of human feeling, certainly of primitive or elemental feeling, than Shelley's "Skylark" or Burns's "Mountain Daisy." Thoreau in one of his critical epigrams declared it was not important that a poet should say any particular thing, but that he should speak in harmony with nature; that "the tone of his voice is the main thing." If that be true, Bryant is one of our best poets. He is always in harmony with nature in her prevailing quiet mood; his voice is invariably gentle, subdued, merging into the murmur of trees or the flow of water,—much like Indian voices, but as unlike as possible to the voices of those who go to nature for a picnic or a camping excursion.

Among the best of his nature poems are "To a Waterfowl" (his most perfect single work), "Forest Hymn," "Hymn to the Sea," "Summer Wind," "Night Journey of a River," "Autumn Woods," "To a Fringed Gentian," "Among the Trees," "The Fountain" and "A Rain Dream." To read

such poems is to understand the fact, mentioned in our biography, that Bryant's poetry was a thing apart from his daily life. His friends all speak of him as a companionable man, receptive, responsive, abounding in cheerful anecdote, and with a certain "overflowing of strength" in mirth or kindly humor; but one finds absolutely nothing of this genial temper in his verse. There he seems to regard all such bubblings and overflowings as unseemly levity (lo! the Puritan), which he must lay aside in poetry as on entering a church. He is,



BRYANT'S HOME, AT CUMMINGTON

as we have said, the priest of nature, in whom reverence is uppermost; and he who reads aloud the "Forest Hymn," with its solemn organ tone, has an impression that it must be followed by the sublime invitation, "O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker."

Though Bryant is always serious, it is worthy of note that he is never gloomy, that he entirely escapes the pessimism or **In Lighter Mood** despair which seizes upon most poets in times of trouble. Moreover, he has a lighter mood, not gay but serenely happy, which finds expression in such poems as "Evening Wind," "Gladness of Nature" and especially "Robert of Lincoln." The exuberance of the last-named, so unlike

anything else in Bryant's book of verse, may be explained on the assumption that not even a Puritan could pull a long face in presence of a bobolink. The intense Americanism of the poet appears in nearly all his verse; and occasionally his patriotism rises to a prophetic strain, as in "The Prairie," for example, written when he first saw what was then called "the great American desert." It is said that the honeybee crossed the Mississippi with the first settlers, and Bryant looks with kindled imagination on this little pioneer who

Fills the savannas with his murmurings,  
And hides his sweets, as in the golden age,  
Within the hollow oak. I listen long  
To his domestic hum, and think I hear  
The sound of that advancing multitude  
Which soon shall fill these deserts. From the ground  
Comes up the laugh of children, the soft voice  
Of maidens, and the sweet and solemn hymn  
Of Sabbath worshippers. The low of herds  
Blends with the rustling of the heavy grain  
Over the dark brown furrows. All at once  
A fresher wind sweeps by, and breaks my dream,  
And I am in the wilderness alone.

**Our Pioneer Poet.** From one point of view our first national poet is a summary of all preceding American verse and a prophecy of better things to come. To be specific, practically all our early poetry shows the inclination to moralize, to sing a song and then add a lesson to it. This is commonly attributed to Puritan influence; but in truth it is a universal poetic impulse, a tribute to the early office of the bard, who was the tribal historian and teacher as well as singer. This ancient didactic or moralizing tendency is very strong in Bryant. To his first notable poem, "Thanatopsis," he must add a final "So live"; and to his "Waterfowl" must be appended a verse which tells what steadfast lesson may be learned from the mutable phenomena of nature.

Again, most of our Colonial and Revolutionary poetry was strongly (or weakly) imitative, and Bryant shows the habit of

his American predecessors. The spiritual conception of nature revealed in some of his early poems is a New World echo of Wordsworth; his somber poems of death indicate that he was familiar with Gray and Young; his "Evening Wind" has some suggestion of Shelley; we suspect the influence of Scott's narrative poems in the neglected "Stella" and "Little People of the Snow." But though influenced by English writers, the author of "Thanatopsis" was too independent to imitate them; and in his independence, with the hearty welcome which it received from the American public, we have a prophecy of the new poetry.

The originality and sturdy independence of Bryant are clearly shown in his choice of subjects. In his early days His Originality poetry was formal and artificial, after the manner of the eighteenth century; the romantic movement had hardly gained recognition in England; Burns was known only to his own countrymen; Wordsworth was ridiculed or barely tolerated by the critics; and poets on both sides of the Atlantic were still writing of larks and nightingales, of moonlight in the vale, of love in a rose-covered cottage, of ivy-mantled towers, weeping willows, neglected graves,—a medley of tears and sentimentality. You will find all these and little else in *The Garland*, *The Token* and many other popular collections of the period; but you will find none of them in Bryant's first or last volume. From the beginning he wrote of Death and Nature; somewhat coldly, to be sure, but with manly sincerity. Then he wrote of Freedom, the watchword of America, not as other singers had written of it but as a Puritan who had learned in bitter conflict the price of his heritage:

O Freedom! thou art not, as poets dream,  
A fair young girl, with light and delicate limbs,  
And wavy tresses gushing from the cap  
With which the Roman master crowned his slave  
When he took off the gyves. A bearded man,  
Armed to the teeth, art thou; one mailed hand

Grasps the broad shield, and one the sword ; thy brow,  
Glorious in beauty though it be, is scarred  
With tokens of old wars ; thy massive limbs  
Are strong with struggling.

He wrote without affectation of the Past, of Winter, of the North Star, of the Crowded Street, of the Yellow Violet and the Fringed Gentian. If the last-named poems now appear too simple for our poetic taste, remember that simplicity is the hardest to acquire of all literary virtues, and that it was the dominant quality of Bryant. Remember also that these modest flowers of which he wrote so modestly had for two hundred years brightened our spring woods and autumn meadows, waiting patiently for the poet who should speak our appreciation of their beauty. Another century has gone, and no other American poet has spoken so simply or so well of other neglected treasures : of the twin flower, for example, most fragrant of all blooms ; or of that other welcome-nodding blossom, beloved of bumblebees, which some call " wild columbine " and others " whippoorwill's shoes."

In a word, Bryant was and is our pioneer poet in the realm of native American poetry. As Emerson said, he was our first original poet, and was original because he dared to be sincere.

#### JAMES FENIMORE COOPER (1789-1851)

In point of time Cooper is the first notable American novelist. Judging by the booksellers, no other has yet approached him in the sustained interest of his work or the number of his readers.

On first analysis we shall find little in Cooper to account for his abiding popularity. The man himself was not exactly The Man lovable ; indeed, he had almost a genius for stirring up antagonism. As a writer he began without study or literary training, and was stilted or slovenly in most of his work. He was prone to moralize in the midst of an exciting

narrative ; he filled countless pages with "wooden" dialogue ; he could not portray a child or a woman or a gentleman, though he was confident that he had often done so to perfection. He did not even know Indians or woodcraft, though Indians and woodcraft account for a large part of our interest in his forest romances.

One may enjoy a good story, however, without knowing or caring for its author's peculiarities, and the vast majority of **The Story-teller** readers are happily not critical but receptive. Hence if we separate the man from the author, and if we read *The Red Rover* or *The Last of the Mohicans* "just for the story," we shall discover the source of Cooper's power as a writer. First of all, he has a tale to tell, an epic tale of heroism and manly virtue. Then he appeals strongly to the pioneer spirit, which survives in all great nations, and he is a master at portraying wild nature as the background of human life. The vigor of elemental manhood, the call of adventure, the lure of primeval forests, the surge and mystery of the sea, — these are written large in Cooper's best books. They make us forget his faults of temper or of style, and they account in large measure for his popularity with young readers of all nations ; for he is one of the few American writers who belong not to any country but to humanity. At present he is read chiefly by boys ; but half a century or more ago he had more readers of all classes and climes than any other writer in the world.

**Life.** The youthful experiences of Cooper furnished him with the material for his best romances. He was born (1789) in New Jersey ; but while he was yet a child the family removed to central New York, where his father had acquired an immense tract of wild land, on which he founded the village that is still called Cooperstown. There on the frontier of civilization, where stood the primeval forest that had witnessed many a wild Indian raid, the novelist passed his boyhood amid the picturesque scenes which he was to immortalize in *The Pioneers* and *The Deerslayer*.

Cooper picked up a little "book learning" in a backwoods school, and a little more in a minister's study at Albany. At thirteen he **His Training** entered Yale; but he was a self-willed lad, and was presently dismissed from college. A little later, after receiving some scant nautical training on a merchantman, he entered the navy as midshipman; but after a brief experience in the service he married and resigned his commission. That was in 1811, and the date is significant. It was just before the second war with Great

Britain. The author who wrote so much and so vividly of battles, Indian raids and naval engagements never was within sight of such affairs, though the opportunity was present. In his romances we have the product of a vigorous imagination rather than of observation or experience.

His literary work seems now like the result of whim or accident. One day he flung down a novel that he was reading, declaring to his wife that he could write a better story himself. "Try it," challenged his wife. "I will," said Cooper; and the result was *Precaution*, a romance of English society.

He was then a farmer in the

Hudson valley, and his knowledge of foreign society was picked up, one must think, from silly novels on the subject.

Strange to say, the story was so well received that the gratified author wrote another. This was *The Spy* (1821), dealing with a Revolutionary hero who had once followed his dangerous calling in the very region in which Cooper was now living. The immense success of this book fairly drove its author into a career. He moved to New York City, and there quickly produced two more successful romances. Thus in four years an unknown man without literary training had become a famous writer, and had moreover produced four different types of fiction: the novel of society in *Precaution*, the



JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

historical romance in *The Spy*, and the adventurous romance of forest and of ocean in *The Pioneers* and *The Pilot*.

Cooper now went abroad, as most famous authors do. His books, already translated into several European languages, had made him known, and he was welcomed in literary circles; but almost immediately he was drawn into squabbles, being naturally inclined that way. He began to write political tirades; and even his romances of the period (*The Bravo*, *The Heidenmauer*, *The Headsman*) were devoted to proclaiming the glories of democracy. Then he returned home and proceeded to set his countrymen by the ears (in such books as *Home as Found*) by writing too frankly of their crudity in contrast with the culture of Europe. Then followed long years of controversy and law-suits, during which our newspapers used Cooper scandalously, and Cooper prosecuted and fined the newspapers. It is a sorry spectacle, of no interest except to those who would understand the bulk of Cooper's neglected works. He was an honest man, vigorous, straightforward, absolutely sincere; but he was prone to waste his strength and embitter his temper by trying to force his opinion on those who were well satisfied with their own. He had no humor, and had never pondered the wisdom of "Who drives fat oxen should himself be fat."

The last years of his life were spent mostly at the old home at Cooperstown, no longer a frontier settlement but a thriving village, from which Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook had long since departed. Before his death (1851) the fires of controversy had sunk to ashes; but Cooper never got over his resentment at the public, and with the idea of keeping forever aloof he commanded that none of his private papers be given to biographers. It is for lack of such personal letters and documents that no adequate life of Cooper has yet been written.



OTSEGO HALL, HOME OF COOPER

**Cooper's Works.** There are over sixty volumes of Cooper, but to read them all would savor of penance rather than of pleasure. Of his miscellaneous writings only the *History of the Navy* and *Lives of Distinguished Naval Officers* are worthy of remembrance. Of his thirty-two romances the half, at least, may be ignored; though critics may differ as to whether certain books (*The Bravo* and *Lionel Lincoln*, for example) should be placed in one half or the other. There remain as the measure of Cooper's genius some sixteen works of fiction, which fall naturally into three groups: the historical novels, the tales of pioneer life, and the romances of the sea.

*The Spy* was the first and probably the best of Cooper's historical romances. Even his admirers must confess that it is crudely written, and that our patriotic interest inclines us to overestimate a story which throws the glamor of romance over the Revolution. Yet this faulty tale attempts to do what very few histories have ever done fairly, namely, to present both sides or parties of the fateful conflict; and its unusual success in this difficult field may be explained by a bit of family history. Cooper was by birth and training a stanch Whig, or Patriot; but his wife, to whom he was devotedly attached, was the daughter of an unbending Tory, or Loyalist; and his divided allegiance is plainly apparent in his work. Ordinarily his personal antagonisms, his hatred of "Yankees," Puritans and all politicians of the other party, are dragged into his stories and spoil some of them; but in *The Spy* he puts his prejudices under restraint, tells his tale in an impersonal way, dealing honestly with both Whigs and Tories, and so produces a work having the double interest of a good adventure story and a fair picture of one of the heroic ages of American history.

Aside from its peculiar American interest, *The Spy* has some original and broadly human elements which have caused it, notwithstanding its dreary, artificial style, to be highly appreciated in other countries, in South American countries

especially. The secret of its appeal lies largely in this, that in Harvey Birch, a brave man who serves his country without hope or possibility of reward, Cooper has strongly portrayed a type of the highest, the most unselfish patriotism.

The other historical novels differ greatly in value. Prominent among them are *Mercedes of Castile*, dealing with Columbus and the discovery of America; *Satanstoe* and *The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish*, depicting Colonial life in New York and New England respectively; and *Lionel Lincoln*, which is another story of the Revolution, more labored than *The Spy* and of less sustained interest.

Cooper's first sea story, *The Pilot* (1823), was haphazard enough in both motive and method,<sup>1</sup> but it gave pleasure to a multitude of readers, and it amazed critics by showing that the lonely sea could be a place of romantic human interest. Cooper was thus the first modern novelist of the ocean; and to his influence we are partly indebted for the stirring tales of such writers as Herman Melville and Clark Russell. A part of the action of *The Pilot* takes place on land (the style and the characters of this part are wretchedly stilted), but the chief interest of the story lies in the adventures of an American privateer commanded by a disguised hero, who turns out to be John Paul Jones. Cooper could not portray such a character, and his effort to make the dashing young captain heroic by surrounding him with a fog of mystery is like his labored attempt to portray the character of Washington in *The Spy*. On the other hand, he was thoroughly at home on a ship or among common sailors; his sea pictures of gallant craft driven before the gale are magnificent; and Long Tom Coffin

<sup>1</sup> The Waverley novels by "the great unknown" were appearing at this time. Scott was supposed to be the author of them, but there was much debate on the subject. One day in New York a member of Cooper's club argued that Scott could not possibly have written *The Pirate* (which had just appeared), because the nautical skill displayed in the book was such as only a sailor could possess. Cooper maintained, on the contrary, that *The Pirate* was the work of a landsman; and to prove it he declared that he would write a sea story as it should be written; that is, with understanding as well as with imagination. *The Pilot* was the result.

is perhaps the most realistic and interesting of all his characters, not excepting even Leatherstocking.

Another and better romance of the sea is *The Red Rover* (1828). In this story the action takes place almost wholly on the deep, and its vivid word pictures of an ocean smiling under the sunrise or lashed to fury by midnight gales are unrivaled in any literature. Other notable books of the same group are *The Water Witch*, *Afloat and Ashore* and *Wing and Wing*. Some readers will prize these for their stories; but to others they may appear tame in comparison with the superb descriptive passages of *The Red Rover*.

When Cooper published *The Pioneers* (1823) he probably had no intention of writing a series of novels recounting the adventures of Natty Bumppo, or Leatherstocking, and his Indian friend Chingachgook; otherwise he would hardly have painted so shabby a picture of these two old heroes, neglected and despised in a land through which they had once moved as masters. Readers were quick to see, however, that these old men had an adventurous past, and when they demanded the rest of the story Cooper wrote four other romances, which are as so many acts in the stirring drama of pioneer life. When these romances are read, therefore, they should be taken in logical sequence, beginning with *The Deerslayer*, which portrays the two heroes as young men on their first war trail, and following in order with *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Pathfinder*, *The Pioneers* and *The Prairie*. If one is to be omitted, let it be *The Pathfinder*, which is comparatively weak and dull; and if only one is to be read, *The Last of the Mohicans* is an excellent choice.

After nearly a century of novel writing, these five books remain our most popular romances of pioneer days, and Leatherstocking is still a wingéd name, a name to conjure with, in most civilized countries. Meanwhile a thousand similar works have come and gone and been forgotten. To examine these later books, which attempt to satisfy the juvenile love of

Leather-  
stocking  
Tales

Indian stories, is to discover that they are modeled more or less closely on the original work of the first American novelist.

**Cooper's Scenes and Characters.** Even in his outdoor romances Cooper was forever attempting to depict human society, especially polite society; but that was the one subject he did not and could not understand. The sea in its grandeur and loneliness; the wild lakes, stretching away to misty, unknown shores or nestling like jewels in their evergreen setting; the forest with its dim trails, its subdued light, its rustlings, whisperings, hints of mystery or peril,—these are his proper scenes, and in them he moves as if at ease in his environment.

In his characters we soon discover the same contrast. If he paints a hero of history, he must put him on stilts to increase his stature. If he portrays a woman, he calls her a "female," makes her a model of decorum, and bores us by her sentimental gabbing. If he describes a social gathering, he instantly betrays his unfamiliarity with real society by talking like a book of etiquette. But with rough men or manly men on land or sea, with half-mutinous crews of privateers or disciplined man-of-war's men, with woodsmen, trappers, Indians, adventurous characters of the border or the frontier,—with all these Cooper is at home, and in writing of them he rises almost to the height of genius.



COOPER'S CAVE

Scene of Indian fight in *The Last of the Mohicans*

If we seek the secret of this contrast, we shall find it partly in the author himself, partly in a popular, half-baked philosophy of the period. That philosophy was summed up in the words "the return to nature," and it alleged that all human virtues flow from solitude and all vices from civilization. Such a philosophy appealed strongly to Cooper, who was continually at odds with his fellows, who had been expelled from Yale, who had engaged in many a bitter controversy, who had suffered abuse from newspapers, and who in every case was inclined to consider his opponents as blockheads. No matter in what society he found himself, in imagination he was always back in the free but lawless atmosphere of the frontier village in which his youth was spent. Hence he was well fitted to take the point of view of Natty Bumppo (in *The Pioneers*), who looked with hostile eyes upon the greed and waste of civilization; hence he portrayed his uneducated backwoods hero as a brave and chivalrous gentleman, without guile or fear or selfishness, who owed everything to nature and nothing to society. Europe at that time was ready to welcome such a type with enthusiasm. The world will always make way for him, whether he appears as a hero of fiction or as a man among men.

**General Characteristics.** The faults of Cooper — his stilted style and slipshod English, his tedious moralizing, his artificial dialogue, his stuffed gentlemen and inane "females," his blunders in woodcraft — all these are so easily discovered by a casual reader that the historian need not linger over them. His virtues are more interesting, and the first of these is that he has a story to tell. Ever since Anglo-Saxon days the "tale-bringer" has been a welcome guest, and that Cooper is a good tale-bringer is evident from his continued popularity at home and abroad. He may not know much about the art of literature, or about psychology, or about the rule that motives must be commensurate with actions; but he knows a good story, and that, after all, is the main thing in a novel.

Again, there is a love of manly action in Cooper and a robustness of imagination which compel attention. He is rather slow in starting his tale; but he always sees a long trail ahead, and knows that every turn of the trail will bring its surprise or adventure. It is only when we analyze and compare his plots that we discover what a prodigal creative power he had. He wrote, let us say, seven or eight good stories; but he spoiled ten times that number by hasty or careless workmanship. In the neglected *Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish*, for example, there is enough wasted material to furnish a modern romancer or dramatist for half a lifetime.

Another fine quality of Cooper is his descriptive power, his astonishing vigor in depicting forest, sea, prairie,—all the Descriptive Power grandeur of wild nature as a background of human heroism. His descriptions are seldom accurate, for he was a careless observer and habitually made blunders; but he painted nature as on a vast canvas whereon details might be ignored, and he reproduced the total impression of nature in a way that few novelists have ever rivaled. It is this sustained power of creating a vast natural stage and peopling it with elemental men, the pioneers of a strong nation, that largely accounts for Cooper's secure place among the world's fiction writers.

Finally, the moral quality of Cooper, his belief in manhood and womanhood, his cleanliness of heart and of tongue, are all Moral Quality reflected in his heroes and heroines. Very often he depicts rough men in savage or brutal situations; but, unlike some modern realists, there is nothing brutal in his morals, and it is precisely where we might expect savagery or meanness that his simple heroes appear as chivalrous gentlemen "without fear and without reproach." That he was here splendidly true to nature and humanity is evident to one who has met his typical men (woodsmen, plainsmen, lumbermen, lonely trappers or timber-cruisers) in their own environment and experienced their rare courtesy and hospitality. In

a word, Cooper knew what virtue is, virtue of white man, virtue of Indian, and he makes us know and respect it. Of a hundred strong scenes which he has vividly pictured there is hardly one that does not leave a final impression as pure and wholesome as the breath of the woods or the sea.

### EDGAR ALLAN POE (1809-1849)

It is a pleasant task to estimate Irving or Bryant, but Poe offers a hard nut for criticism to crack. The historian is baffled by an author who secretes himself in the shadow, or perplexed by conflicting biographies, or put on the defensive by the fact that any positive judgment or opinion of Poe will almost certainly be challenged.

At the outset, therefore, we are to assume that Poe is one of the most debatable figures in our literature. His life may be summed up as a pitiful struggle for a little fame and a little bread. When he died few missed him, and his works were neglected. Following his recognition in Europe came a revival of interest here, during which Poe was absurdly overpraised and the American people berated for their neglect of a genius. Then arose a literary controversy which showed chiefly that our critics were poles apart in their points of view. Though the controversy has long endured, it has settled nothing of importance; for one reader regards Poe as a literary *poseur*, a writer of melodious nonsense in verse and of grotesque horrors in prose; while another exalts him as a double master of poetry and fiction, an artist without a peer in American letters.

Somewhere between these extremes hides the truth; but we shall not here attempt to decide whether it is nearer one side or the other. We note merely that Poe is a writer for such mature readers as can appreciate his uncanny talent. What he wrote of abiding interest or value to young people might be printed in a very small book.

**Biographical Sketch.** Notwithstanding all that has been written about Poe, we do not and cannot know him as we know most other American authors, whose lives are as an open book. He was always a secretive person, "a lover of mystery and retreats," and such accounts of his life as he gave out are not trustworthy. He came from a good Maryland family, but apparently from one of those offshoots that are not true to type. His father left the study of law to become a strolling actor, and presently married an English actress. It was while the father and mother were playing their parts in Boston that Edgar was born, in 1809.

Actors led a miserable life in those days, and the Poes were no exception. They died comfortless in Richmond; their three children were separated; and Edgar was adopted by John Allan, a wealthy tobacco merchant. It was in the luxurious Allan home that the boy began the drinking habits which were his bane ever afterwards.

The Allans were abroad on business from 1815 to 1820, and during these years Edgar was at a private school in the suburbs of **Poe's School** London. It was the master of that school who described **Days** the boy as a clever lad spoiled by too much pocket money. The prose tale "William Wilson" has some reflection of these school years, and, so far as known, it is the only work in which Poe introduced any of his familiar experiences.



EDGAR ALLAN POE

Soon after his return to Richmond the boy was sent to the University of Virginia, where his brilliant record as a student was marred by his tendency to dissipation. After the first year Mr. Allan, finding that the boy had run up a big gambling debt, took him from college and put him to work in the tobacco house. Whereupon Edgar, always resentful of criticism, quarreled with his foster father and drifted out into the world. He was then, at eighteen, a young man of fine bearing, having the taste and manners of a gentleman; but he had no friend in the world, no heritage of hard work, no means of earning a living.



WEST RANGE, UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Next we hear vaguely of Poe in Boston, where he published a tiny volume, *Tamerlane and Other Poems, by a Bostonian* (1827).

**His** Failing to win either fame or money by his poetry, he **Wanderings** enlisted in the army under an assumed name and served for about two years. Of his army life we know nothing, nor do we hear of him again until his foster father secured for him an appointment to the military academy at West Point. There Poe made an excellent beginning; but he soon neglected his work, was dismissed, and became an Ishmael again. After trying in vain to secure a political office he went to Baltimore, where he earned a bare living by writing for the newspapers. The popular but mythical account of his life (for which he himself is partly responsible) portrays him at this period in a Byronic rôle, fighting with the Greeks for their liberty.

His literary career began in 1833, when his "Manuscript Found in a Bottle" won for him a prize offered by a weekly newspaper.

The same "Manuscript" brought him to the attention of John Pendleton Kennedy, who secured for him a position on the staff of the *Southern Literary Messenger*. He then settled in Richmond, and in his grasp was everything that the heart of a young author might desire. He had married his cousin, Virginia Clem, a beautiful young girl whom he idolized; he had a comfortable home and an assured position; Kennedy and other southern writers were his loyal friends; the *Messenger* published his work and gave him a reputation in the literary world of America. Fortune stood smiling beside him, when he quarreled with his friends, left the *Messenger* and began once more his struggle with poverty and despair.

It would require a volume to describe the next few years, and we must pass hurriedly over them. His pen was now his only hope, and he used it diligently in an effort to win recognition and a living. He tried his fortune in different cities; he joined the staffs of various periodicals; he projected magazines of his own. In every project success was apparently within his reach when by some weakness or misfortune he let his chance slip away. He was living in Fordham (a suburb of New York, now called the Bronx) when he did his best work; but there his wife died, in need of the common comforts of life; and so destitute was the home that an appeal was made in the newspapers for charity. One has but to remember Poe's pride to understand how bitter was the cup from which he drank.

After his wife's death came two frenzied years in which not even the memory of a great love kept him from unmanly wooing of other women; but Poe was then unbalanced and not wholly responsible for his action. At forty he became engaged to a widow in Richmond, who could offer him at least a home. Generous friends raised a fund to start him in life afresh; but a little later he was found unconscious amid sordid surroundings in Baltimore. He died there, in a hospital, before he was able to give any lucid account of his last wanderings. It was a pitiful end; but one who studies Poe at any part of his career has an impression of a perverse fate that dogs the man and that insists on an ending in accord with the rest of the story.

**The Poetry of Poe.** Most people read Poe's poetry for the melody that is in it. To read it in any other way, to analyze or explain its message, is to dissect a butterfly that changes in

a moment from a delicate, living creature to a pinch of dust, bright colored but meaningless. It is not for analysis, therefore, but simply for making Poe more intelligible that we record certain facts or principles concerning his verse.

Perhaps the first thing to note is that Poe is not the poet of smiles and tears, of joy and sorrow, as the great poets are, **Theory of Poetry** but the poet of a single mood,—a dull, despairing mood without hope of comfort. Next, he had a theory (a strange theory in view of his mood) that the only object of poetry is to give pleasure, and that the pleasure of a poem depends largely on melody, on sound rather than on sense. Finally, he believed that poetry should deal with beauty alone, that poetic beauty is of a supernal or unearthly kind, and that such beauty is forever associated with melancholy. To Poe the most beautiful imaginable object was a beautiful woman; but since her beauty must perish, the poet must assume a tragic or despairing attitude in face of it. Hence his succession of shadowy Helens, and hence his wail of grief that he has lost or must soon lose them.

All these poetic theories, or delusions, appear in Poe's most widely known work, "The Raven," which has given pleasure to a multitude of readers. It is a unique poem, and

**The Raven** its popularity is due partly to the fact that nobody can tell what it means. To analyze it is to discover that it is extremely melodious; that it reflects a gloomy mood; that at the root of its sorrow is the mysterious "lost Lenore"; and that, as in most of Poe's works, a fantastic element is introduced, an "ungainly fowl" addressed with grotesque dignity as "Sir, or Madame," to divert attention from the fact that the poet's grief is not simple or human enough for tears:

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting  
 On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;  
 And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,  
 And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;  
 And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor  
 Shall be lifted — nevermore!

Equally characteristic of the author are "To One in Paradise," "The Sleeper" and "Annabel Lee," — all melodious, all in hopeless mood, all expressive of the same abnormal idea of poetry. Other and perhaps better poems are "The Coliseum," "Israfel," and especially the second "To Helen," beginning, "Helen, thy beauty is to me."

Young readers may well be content with a few such lyrics, leaving the bulk of Poe's poems to such as may find meaning in their vaporous images. As an example, study these two stanzas from "Ulalume," a work which some may find very poetic and others somewhat lunatic :

The skies they were ashen and sober;  
The leaves they were crispéd and sere —  
The leaves they were withering and sere;  
It was night in the lonesome October  
Of my most immemorial year;  
It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,  
In the misty mid region of Weir —  
It was down by the dank tarn of Auber,  
In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

Here once, through an alley Titanic  
Of cypress, I roamed with my soul —  
Of cypress, with Psyche, my soul.  
These were days when my heart was volcanic  
As the scoriac rivers that roll —  
As the lavas that restlessly roll  
Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek,  
In the ultimate climes of the pole —  
That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek,  
In the realms of the boreal pole.

This is melodious, to be sure, but otherwise it is mere word juggling, a stringing together of names and rimes with a total effect of lugubrious nonsense. It is not to be denied that some critics find pleasure in "Ulalume"; but uncritical readers need not doubt their taste or intelligence if they prefer counting-out rimes, "The Jabberwock," or other nonsense verses that are more frankly and joyously nonsensical.

**Poe's Fiction.** Should it be asked why Poe's tales are nearly all of the bloodcurdling variety, the answer is that they are a triple reflection of himself, of the fantastic romanticism of his age, and of the taste of readers who were then abnormally fond of ghastly effects in fiction. Let us understand these elements clearly; for otherwise Poe's horrible stories will give us nothing beyond the mere impression of horror.

To begin with the personal element, Poe was naturally inclined to morbidness. He had a childish fear of darkness *The Man and his Times* and hobgoblins; he worked largely "on his nerves"; he had an abnormal interest in graves, ghouls and the terrors which preternatural subjects inspire in superstitious minds. As a writer he had to earn his bread; and the fiction most in demand at that time was of the "gothic" or *Mysteries of Udolpho* kind, with its diabolical villain, its pallid heroine in a haunted room, its medley of mystery and horror.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the century Charles Brockden Brown had made a success of the "American gothic" (a story of horror modified to suit American readers), and Poe carried on the work of Brown with precisely the same end in view, namely, to please his audience. He used the motive of horror partly because of his own taste and training, no doubt, but more largely because he shrewdly "followed the market" in fiction. Then as now there were many readers who enjoyed, as Stevenson says, being "frightened out of their boots," and to such readers he appealed. His individuality and, perhaps, his chief excellence as a story-writer lay in his use of strictly logical methods, in his ability to make the most impossible yarn seem real by his reasonable way of telling it. Moreover, he was a discoverer, an innovator, a maker of new types, since he was the first to introduce in his stories the blend of calm, logical science and

<sup>1</sup> As Richardson suggests, the popular novels of Poe's day are nearly all alike in that they remind us of the fat boy in *Pickwick*, who "just wanted to make your flesh creep." Jane Austen (and later, Scott and Cooper) had written against this morbid tendency, but still the "gothic" novel had its thousands of shuddering readers on both sides of the Atlantic.

wild fancy of a terrifying order; so he served as an inspiration as well as a point of departure for Jules Verne and other writers of the same pseudo-scientific school.

Poe's numerous tales may be grouped in three or four classes. Standing by itself is "William Wilson," a story of double personality (one good and one evil genius in the same person), to which Stevenson was indebted in his *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Next are the tales of pseudo-science and adventure, such as "Hans Pfaall" and the "Descent into the Maelstrom," which represent a type of popular fiction developed by Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and many others, all of whom were more or less influenced by Poe. A third group may be called the ingenious-mystery stories. One of the most typical of these is "The Gold Bug," a tale of cipher-writing and buried treasure, which contains the germ, at least, of Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. To the same group belong "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and other stories dealing with the wondrous acumen of a certain Dupin, who is the father of "Old Sleuth," "Sherlock Holmes" and other amateur detectives who do such marvelous things in fiction,—to atone, no doubt, for their extraordinary dullness in real life.

Still another group consists of phantom stories,—ghastly yarns that serve no purpose but to make the reader's spine creep. The mildest of these horrors is "The Fall of the House of Usher," which some critics place at the head of Poe's fiction. It is a "story of atmosphere"; that is, a story in which the scene, the air, the vague "feeling" of a place arouse an expectation of some startling or unusual incident. Many have read this story and found pleasure therein; but others ask frankly, "Why bother to write or to read such palpable nonsense?" With all Poe's efforts to make it real, Usher's house is not a home or even a building in which dwells a man; it is a vacuum inhabited by a chimera. Of necessity, therefore, it tumbles into melodramatic nothingness the moment the author takes leave of it.

If it be asked, "What shall one read of Poe's fiction?" the answer must depend largely upon individual taste. "The Gold Bug" is a good story, having the adventurous interest of finding a pirate's hidden gold; at least, that is how most readers regard it, though Poe meant us to be interested not in the gold but in his ingenious cryptogram or secret writing. The allegory of "William Wilson" is per-

haps the most original of Poe's works; and for a thriller "The House of Usher" may be recommended as the least repulsive of the tales of horror. To the historian the chief interest of all these tales lies in the influence which they have exerted on a host of short-story writers at home and abroad.

#### An Estimate of Poe.

Any summary of such a difficult subject is unsatisfactory and sub-

THE BUILDING OF THE SOUTHERN  
LITERARY MESSENGER

ject to challenge. We shall try here simply to outline Poe's aim and method, leaving the student to supply from his own reading most of the details and all the exceptions.

Poe's chief purpose was not to tell a tale for its own sake or to portray a human character; he aimed to produce an effect or impression in the reader's mind, an impression of unearthly beauty in his poems and of unearthly horror in his prose. Some writers (Hawthorne, for example) go through life as in a dream; but if one were to judge Poe by his work, one might think that he had suffered a long nightmare. Of



his familiar experience, his youth, his army training, his meeting with other men, his impressions of nature or humanity, there is hardly a trace in his work ; of despair, terror and hallucinations there is a plethora.

His Method His method was at once haphazard and carefully elaborated, — a paradox, it seems, till we examine his work or read his records thereof. In his poetry words appealed to him, as they appeal to some children, not so much for their meaning as for their sound. Thus the word "nevermore," a gloomy, terrible word, comes into his mind, and he proceeds to brood over it. The shadow of a great loss is in the word, and loss meant to Poe the loss of beauty in the form of a woman ; therefore he invents "the lost Lenore" to rime with his "nevermore." Some outward figure of despair is now needed, something that will appeal to the imagination ; and for that Poe selects the sable bird that poets have used since Anglo-Saxon times as a symbol of gloom or mystery. Then carefully, line by line, he hammers out "The Raven," a poem which from beginning to end is built around the word "nevermore" with its suggestion of pitiless memories.

Or again, Poe is sitting at the bedside of his dead wife when another word suddenly appeals to him. It is Shakespeare's

Duncan is in his grave ;  
After life's fitful fever he sleeps well.

And from that word is born "For Annie," with an ending to the first stanza which is an epitome of the poem, and which Longfellow suggested as a fitting epitaph for Poe's tomb :

And the fever called "Living"  
Is conquered at last.

He reads Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," and his "Manuscript Found in a Bottle" is the elaborated result of his chance inspiration. He sees Cooper make a success of a sea tale, and Irving of a journal of exploration ; and, though he knows naught of the sea or the prairie, he produces his

hair-raising *Arthur Gordon Pym* and his *Journal of Julius Rodman*. Some sailor's yarn of a maelstrom in the North Sea comes to his ears, and he fabricates a story of a man who went into the whirlpool. He sees a newspaper account of a premature burial, and his "House of Usher" and several other stories reflect the imagined horror of such an experience. The same criticism applies to his miscellaneous thrillers, in which with rare cunning he uses phantoms, curtains, shadows, cats, the moldy odor of the grave,—and all to make a gruesome tale inspired by some wild whim or nightmare.

In fine, no other American writer ever had so slight a human basis for his work; no other ever labored more patiently or more carefully. The unending controversy over Poe commonly reduces itself to this deadlock: one reader asks, "What did he do that was worth a man's effort in the doing?" and another answers, "What did he do that was not cleverly, skillfully done?"

**Summary.** The early part of the nineteenth century (sometimes called the First National period of American letters) was a time of unusual enthusiasm. The country had recently won its independence and taken its place among the free nations of the world; it had emerged triumphant from a period of doubt and struggle over the Constitution and the Union; it was increasing with amazing rapidity in territory, in population and in the wealth which followed a successful commerce; its people were united as never before by noble pride in the past and by a great hope for the future. It is not surprising, therefore, that our first really national literature (that is, a literature which was read by practically the whole country, and which represented America to foreign nations) should appear in this expansive age as an expression of the national enthusiasm.

The four chief writers of the period are: Irving, the pleasant essayist, story-teller and historian; Bryant, the poet of primeval nature; Cooper,

**Chief  
Writers** the novelist, who was the first American author to win worldwide fame; and Poe, the most cunning craftsman among our early writers, who wrote a few melodious poems and many tales of mystery or horror. Some critics would include also among the major writers William Gilmore Simms (sometimes called "the Cooper of the South"), author of many adventurous romances dealing with pioneer life and with Colonial and Revolutionary history.

The numerous minor writers of the age are commonly grouped in local schools. The Knickerbocker school, of New York, includes the poets Halleck and Drake, the novelist Paulding, and one writer of miscellaneous prose and verse, Nathaniel P. Willis, who was for a time more popular than any other American writer save Cooper. In the southern school (led by Poe and Simms) were Wilde, Kennedy and William Wirt. The West was represented by Timothy Flint and James Hall. In New England were the poets Percival and Maria Brooks, the novelists Sarah Morton and Catherine Sedgwick, and the historians Sparks and Bancroft. The writers we have named are merely typical; there were literally hundreds of others who were more or less widely known in the middle of the last century.

The first common characteristic of these writers was their patriotic enthusiasm; the second was their romantic spirit. The romantic movement

**Foreign Influence** in English poetry was well under way at this time, and practically all our writers were involved in it. They were strongly influenced, moreover, by English writers of the period or by settled English literary traditions. Thus, Irving modeled his style closely on that of Addison; the early poetry of Bryant shows the influence of Wordsworth; the weird tales of Poe and his critical essays were both alike influenced by Coleridge; and the quickening influence of Scott appears plainly in the romances of Cooper. The minor writers were even more subject to foreign influences, especially to German and English romanticism. There was, however, a sturdy independence in the work of most of these writers which stamps it as original and unmistakably American. The nature poetry of Bryant with its rugged strength and simplicity, the old Dutch legends and stories of Irving, the pioneer romances of Cooper and Simms, the effective short stories of Poe,—these have hardly a counterpart in foreign writings of the period. They are the first striking expressions of the new American spirit in literature.

**Selections for Reading.** Irving's Sketch Book, in Standard English Classics and various other school editions (see "Texts" in General Bibliography); The Alhambra, in Ginn and Company's Classics for Children; parts of Bracebridge Hall, in Riverside Literature; Conquest of Granada and other works, in Everyman's Library.

Selections from Bryant, in Riverside Literature and Pocket Classics.

Cooper's Last of the Mohicans, in Standard English Classics and other school editions; the five Leatherstocking tales, in Everyman's Library; The Spy, in Riverside Literature.

Selections from Poe, prose and verse, in Standard English Classics, Silver Classics, Johnson's English Classics, Lake English Classics.

Simms's The Yemassee, in Johnson's English Classics. Typical selections from minor authors of the period, in Readings from American Literature and other anthologies (see "Selections" in General Bibliography).

**Bibliography.** For works covering the whole field of American history and literature see the General Bibliography. The following are recommended for a special study of the early part of the nineteenth century.

**History.** Adams, *History of the United States, 1801-1817*, 9 vols.; Von Holst, *Constitutional and Political History, 1787-1861*, 8 vols.; Sparks, *Expansion of the American People*; Low, *The American People: Expedition of Lewis and Clarke*, in *Original Narratives Series* (Scribner); Page, *The Old South*; Drake, *The Making of the West*.

**Literature.** There is no good literary history devoted to this period. Critical studies of the authors named in the text may be found in Richardson's *American Literature* and other general histories. For the lives of minor authors see Adams, *Dictionary of American Authors*, or Appleton's *Cyclopedia of American Biography*.

**Irving.** *Life and Letters*, by P. M. Irving, 4 vols., in Crayon edition of Irving's works. *Life* by Warner, in *American Men of Letters*; by Hill, in *American Authors*; by Boynton (brief), in *Riverside Biographies*.

Essays by Brownell, in *American Prose Masters*; by Payne, in *Leading American Essayists*; by Perry, in *A Study of Prose Fiction*; by Curtis, in *Literary and Social Addresses*.

**Bryant.** *Life*, by Godwin, 2 vols.; by Bigelow, in *American Men of Letters*; by Curtis. *Wilson, Bryant and his Friends*.

Essays, by Stedman, in *Poets of America*; by Curtis, in *Orations and Addresses*; by Whipple, in *Literature and Life*; by Burton, in *Literary Leaders*.

**Cooper.** *Life*, by Lounsbury, in *American Men of Letters*; by Clymer (brief), in *Beacon Biographies*.

Essays, by Erskine, in *Leading American Novelists*; by Brownell, in *American Prose Masters*; by Matthews, in *Gateways to Literature*.

**Poe.** *Life*, by Woodberry, in *American Men of Letters*; by Trent, in *English Men of Letters*; *Life and Letters*, 2 vols., by Harrison.

Essays, by Stedman, in *Poets of America*; by Brownell, in *American Prose Masters*; by Burton, in *Literary Leaders*; by Higginson, in *Short Studies of American Authors*; by Andrew Lang, in *Letters to Dead Authors*; by Gates, in *Studies and Appreciations*; by Gosse, in *Questions at Issue*.

**Simms.** *Life*, by Trent, in *American Men of Letters*. Critical studies by Moses, in *Literature of the South*; by Link, in *Pioneers of Southern Literature*; by Wauchope, in *Writers of South Carolina*.

**Fiction.** A few novels dealing with the period are: Brown, Arthur Merwyn; Kennedy, *Swallow Barn*; Paulding, *Westward Ho*; Mrs. Stowe, *The Minister's Wooing*; Cooke, *Leather Stocking and Silk*; Eggleston, *The Circuit Rider*, *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*; Winthrop, John Brent.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PERIOD OF CONFLICT (1840-1876)

The muffled drum's sad roll has beat  
The soldier's last tattoo;  
No more on Life's parade shall meet  
That brave and fallen few.  
On Fame's eternal camping-ground  
Their silent tents are spread,  
And Glory guards, with solemn round,  
The bivouac of the dead.

O'Hara, "The Bivouac of the Dead"

**Political History.** To study the history of America after 1840 is to have our attention drawn as by a powerful lodestone to the Civil War. It looms there in the middle of the nineteenth century, a stupendous thing, dominating and dwarfing all others. To it converge many ways that then seemed aimless or wandering, the unanswered questions of the Constitution, the compromises of statesmen, the intrigues of politicians, the clamor of impatient reformers, the silent degradation of the slave. And from it, all its passion and suffering forgotten, its heroism remembered, proceed the unexpected blessings of a finer love of country, a broader sense of union, a surer faith in democracy, a better understanding of the spirit of America, more gratitude for her glorious past, more hope for her future. So every thought or mention of the mighty conflict draws us onward, as the first sight of the Rockies, massive and snow crowned, lures the feet of the wanderer on the plains.

We shall not attempt here to summarize the war between the South and the North or even to list its causes and consequences. The theme is too vast. We note only that the main issues of the conflict, state rights and slavery, had been debated for the better part of a century, and might still have found peaceful solution had they not been complicated by the minor issues of such an age of agitation as America never saw before and, as we devoutly hope, may never see again.

Such agitation was perhaps inevitable in a country that had grown too rapidly for its government to assimilate the new possessions. By **The Age of Agitation** the Oregon treaty, the war with Mexico and the annexation of Texas vast territories had suddenly been added to the Union, each with its problem that called for patient and wise deliberation, but that a passionate and half-informed Congress was expected to settle overnight. With the expansion of territory in the West came a marvelous increase of trade and wealth in the North,

and a corresponding growth in the value of cotton and slave labor in the South. Then arose an economic strife; the agricultural interests of one part of the country clashed with the manufacturing interests of another (in such matters as the tariff, for example), and in the tumult of party politics it was impossible to reach any harmonious adjustment. Finally, the violent agitation of the slave question forced it to the front not simply as a moral or human but as a political issue; for the old "balance of power" between the states was upset when the North began to outstrip the South in population, and every state was then fiercely jealous of its individual



"THE MAN"

rights and obligations in a way that we can now hardly comprehend.

As a result of these conflicting interests and the local or sectional passions which they aroused, there was seldom a year after 1840 when the country did not face a situation of extreme difficulty or danger. Indeed, even while Webster was meditating his prophetic oration with its superb climax of "Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable," many of the most thoughtful minds, south and north, believed that Congress faced a problem beyond its power to solve; that no single government was wise enough or strong enough to meet the situation, especially a government divided against itself.

**The Wind and the Whirlwind** In the midst of the political tumult, which was increased by the clamor of agitators and reformers, came suddenly the secession of a state from the Union, an act long threatened, long feared, but which arrived at last with the paralyzing effect of a thunderbolt. Then the clamor ceased; minor questions were swept aside as by a tempest, and the main issues were settled not by constitutional rights, not by orderly process of law or the ballot, but by the fearful arbitrament of the sword. And even as the thunderbolt fell and the Union trembled, came also unheralded one gaunt, heroic, heaven-sent man to lead the nation in its hour of peril:

Oh, slow to smite and swift to spare,  
Gentle and merciful and just!  
Who in the fear of God didst bear  
The sword of power, a nation's trust!

Such is an outline of the period of conflict, an outline to which the political measures or compromises of the time, its sectional antagonism, its score of political parties, its agitators, reformers, and all other matters of which we read confusedly in the histories, are but so many illuminating details.

**Social and Intellectual Changes.** The mental ferment of the period was almost as intense as its political agitation. Thus, the antislavery movement, which aimed to rescue the negro from his servitude, was accompanied by a widespread communistic attempt to save the white man from the manifold evils of our competitive system of industry. Brook Farm<sup>1</sup> was the most famous of these communities; but there were more than thirty others scattered over the country, all holding property in common, working on a basis of mutual helpfulness, aiming at a nobler life and a better system of labor than that which now separates the capitalist and the workingman.

This brave attempt at human brotherhood, of which Brook Farm was the visible symbol, showed itself in many other ways: in the Widening Horizons projection of a hundred social reforms; in the establishment of lyceums throughout the country, where every man with a message might find a hearing. In education our whole school system was changed by applying the methods of Pestalozzi, a Swiss reformer; for the world had suddenly become small, thanks to

<sup>1</sup> This was a Massachusetts society, founded in 1841 by George Ripley. It included Hawthorne, Dana and Curtis in its large membership, and it had the support of Emerson, Greeley, Channing, Margaret Fuller and a host of other prominent men and women.

steam and electricity, and what was spoken in a corner the newspapers immediately proclaimed from the housetops. In religious circles the Unitarian movement, under Channing's leadership, gained rapidly in members and in influence; in literature the American horizon was broadened by numerous translations from the classic books of foreign countries; in the realm of philosophy the western mind was stimulated by the teaching of the idealistic system known as Transcendentalism.

Emerson was the greatest exponent of this new philosophy, which made its appearance here in 1836. It exalted the value of the individual man above society or institutions: and in dealing with the individual it emphasized his freedom rather than his subjection to authority, his soul rather than his body, his inner wealth of character rather than his outward possessions. It taught that nature was an open book of the Lord, in which he who runs may read a divine message; and in contrast with eighteenth-century philosophy (which had described man as a creature of the senses, born with a blank mind, and learning only by experience), it emphasized the divinity of man's nature, his inborn ideas of right and wrong, his instinct of God, his passion for immortality, — in a word, his higher knowledge which transcends the knowledge gained from the senses, and which is summarized in the word "Transcendentalism."

We have described this in the conventional way as a new philosophy, though in truth it is almost as old as humanity. Most of the great thinkers of the world, in all ages and in all countries, have been transcendentalists; but in the original way in which the doctrine was presented by Emerson it seemed like a new revelation, as all fine old things do when they are called to our attention, and it exercised a profound influence on our American life and literature.

**Literature of the Period.** The violent political agitation and the profound social unrest of the period found expression in multitudinous works of prose or verse; but the curious fact is that these are all minor works, and could without much loss be omitted from our literary records. They are mostly sectional in spirit, and only what is national or human can long endure.

To illustrate our criticism, the terrible war that dominates the period never had any worthy literary expression; there are thousands of writings but not a single great poem or story or

essay or drama on the subject. The antislavery movement likewise brought forth its poets, novelists, orators and essayists; **Minor Works** some of the greater writers were drawn into its whirlpool of agitation, and Whittier voiced the conviction that the age called for a man rather than a poet in a cry which was half defiance and half regret:

Better than self-indulgent years  
The outflung heart of youth,  
Than pleasant songs in idle ears  
The tumult of the truth!

That was the feeling in the heart of many a promising young southern or northern poet in midcentury, just as it was in 1776, when our best writers neglected literature for political satires against Whigs or Tories. Yet of the thousand works which the antislavery agitation inspired we can think of only one, Mrs. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which lives with power to our own day; and there is something of universal human nature in that famous book, written not from knowledge or experience but from the imagination, which appeals broadly to our human sympathy, and which makes it welcome in countries where slavery as a political or a moral issue has long since been forgotten.

Though the ferment of the age produced no great books, it certainly influenced our literature, making it a very different product from that of the early national period.

**General Character-istics** For example, nearly every political issue soon became a moral issue; and there is a deep ethical earnestness in the essays of Emerson, the poems of Longfellow and the novels of Hawthorne which sets them apart, as of a different spirit, from the works of Irving, Poe and Cooper.

Again, the mental unrest of the period showed itself in a passion for new ideas, new philosophy, new prose and poetry. We have already spoken of the transcendental philosophy, but even more significant was the sudden broadening of literary interest. American readers had long been familiar with the

best English poets; now they desired to know how our common life had been reflected by poets of other nations. In answer to that desire came, first, the establishment of professorships of *belles-lettres* in our American colleges; and then a flood of translations from European and oriental literatures. As we shall presently see, every prominent writer from Emerson to Whitman was influenced by new views of life as reflected in the world's poetry. Longfellow is a conspicuous example; with his songs inspired by Spanish or German or Scandinavian

originals he is at times more like an echo of Europe than a voice from the New World.

Finally, this period of conflict was governed more largely than usual by ideals, by sentiment, by intense feeling. Witness the war, with the heroic sentiments which it summoned



BIRTHPLACE OF LONGFELLOW, AT FALMOUTH  
(NOW PORTLAND), MAINE

up south and north. As the deepest human feeling cannot be voiced in prose, we confront the strange phenomenon of an *An Age of Poetry* American age of poetry. This would be remarkable enough to one who remembers that the genius of America had hitherto appeared practical and prosaic, given to action rather than speech, more concerned to "get on" in life than to tell what life means; but it is even more remarkable in view of the war, which covers the age with its frightful shadow. As Lincoln, sad and overburdened, found the relief of tears in the beautiful ending of Longfellow's "Building of the Ship," so, it seems, the heart of America, torn by the sight of her sons in conflict, found blessed relief in songs of

love, of peace, of home, of beauty,—of all the lovely and immortal ideals to which every war offers violent but impotent contradiction. And this may be the simple explanation of the fact that the most cherished poems produced by any period of war are almost invariably its songs of peace.

### THE GREATER POETS

#### HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW (1807-1882)

When Longfellow sent forth his *Voices of the Night*, in 1839, that modest little volume met with a doubly warm reception. Critics led by Poe pounced on the work to condemn its sentimentality or moralizing, while a multitude of readers who needed no leader raised a great shout of welcome.

Now as then there are diverse critical opinions of Longfellow, and unfortunately these opinions sometimes obscure the more interesting facts: that Longfellow is still the favorite of the American home, the most honored of all our elder poets; that in foreign schools his works are commonly used as an introduction to English verse, and that he has probably led more young people to appreciate poetry than any other poet who ever wrote our language. That strange literary genius Lafcadio Hearn advised his Japanese students to begin the study of poetry with Longfellow, saying that they might learn to like other poets better in later years, but that Longfellow was most certain to charm them at the beginning.

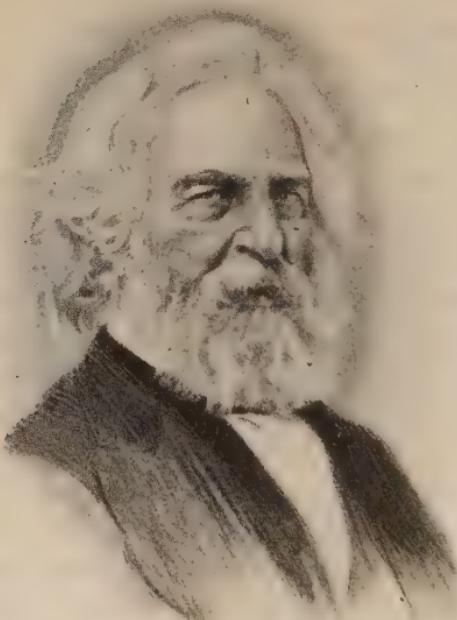
The reason for this advice, given to the antipodes, was probably this, that young hearts and pure hearts are the same the world over, and Longfellow is the poet of the young and pure in heart.

**Life.** The impression of serenity in Longfellow's work may be explained by the gifts which Fortune offered him in the way of endowment, training and opportunity. By nature he was a gentleman; his home training was of the best; to his college education four years of foreign study were added, a very unusual thing at that

time; and no sooner was he ready for his work than the way opened as if the magic *Sesame* were on his lips. His own college gave him a chair of modern languages and literature, which was the very thing he wanted; then Harvard offered what seemed to him a wider field, and finally his country called him from the professor's chair to teach

the love of poetry to the whole nation. Before his long and beautiful life ended he had enjoyed for half a century the two rewards that all poets desire, and the most of them in vain; namely, fame and love. The first may be fairly won; the second is a free gift.

Longfellow was born (1807) in the town of Falmouth, Maine, which has since been transformed into the city of Portland. Like Bryant he was descended from Pilgrim stock; but where the older poet's training had been strictly puritanic, Longfellow's was more liberal and broadly cul-



HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

tured. Bryant received the impulse to poetry from his grandfather's prayers, but Longfellow seems to have heard his first call in the sea wind. Some of his best lyrics sing of the ocean; his early book of essays was called *Driftwood*, his last volume of poetry *In the Harbor*; and in these lyrics and titles we have a reflection of his boyhood impressions in looking forth from the beautiful Falmouth headland, then a wild, wood-fringed pasture but now a formal park:

I remember the black wharves and the slips,  
 And the sea tides tossing free,  
 And Spanish sailors with bearded lips,  
 And the beauty and mystery of the ships,  
 And the magic of the sea.

This first call was presently neglected for the more insistent summons of literature; and thereafter Longfellow's inspiration was at **The Call of Books** second hand, from books rather than from nature or humanity. Soon after his graduation from Bowdoin (1825) he was offered a professorship in modern languages on condition that he prepare himself for the work by foreign study. With a glad heart he abandoned the law, which he had begun to study in his father's office, and spent three happy years in France, Spain and Italy. There he steeped himself in European poetry, and picked up a reading knowledge of several languages. Strangely enough, the romantic influence of Europe was reflected by this poet in a book of prose essays, *Outre Mer*, modeled on Irving's *Sketch Book*.

For five years Longfellow taught the modern languages at Bowdoin, and his subject was so new in America that he had to prepare his **Years of Teaching** own textbooks. Then, after another period of foreign study (this time in Denmark and Germany), he went to Harvard, where he taught modern languages and literature for eighteen years. In 1854 he resigned his chair, and for the remainder of his life devoted himself whole-heartedly to poetry.

His literary work began with newspaper verses, the best of which appear in the "Earlier Poems" of his collected works. Next he attempted prose in his *Outre Mer*, *Driftwood Essays* and the romances *Hyperion* and *Kavanagh*. In 1839 appeared his first volume of poetry, *Voices of the Night*, after which few years went by without some notable poem or volume from Longfellow's pen. His last book, *In the Harbor*, appeared with the news of his death, in 1882.

Aside from these "milestones" there is little to record in a career so placid that we remember by analogy "The Old Clock on the **His Serenity** Stairs." For the better part of his life he lived in Cambridge, where he was surrounded by a rare circle of friends, and whither increasing numbers came from near or far to pay the tribute of gratitude to one who had made life more beautiful by his singing. Once only the serenity was broken by a tragedy, the death of the poet's wife, who was fatally burned before his eyes,—a tragedy which occasioned his translation of Dante's *Divina Commedia* (by which work he strove to keep his sorrow from overwhelming him) and the exquisite "Cross of Snow." The latter seemed too sacred for publication; it was found, after the poet's death, among his private papers.

Reading Longfellow's poems one would never suspect that they were produced in an age of turmoil. To be sure, one finds a few poems on slavery (sentimental effusions, written on ship-board to relieve the monotony of a voyage), but these were better unwritten since they added nothing to the poet's song and took nothing from the slave's burden. Longfellow has been criticized for his inaction in the midst of tumult, but possibly he had his reasons. When everybody's shouting is an excellent time to hold your tongue. He had his own work to do, a work for which he was admirably fitted; that he did not turn aside from it is to his credit and our profit. One demand of his age was, as we have noted elsewhere, to enter into the wealth of European poetry; and he gave thirty years of his life to satisfying that demand. Our own poetry was then sentimental, a kind of "sugared angel-cake"; and Longfellow, who was sentimental enough but whose sentiment was balanced by scholarship, made poetry that was like wholesome bread to common men. Lowell was a more brilliant writer, and Whittier a more inspired singer; but neither did a work for American letters that is comparable to that of Longfellow, who was essentially an educator, a teacher of new ideas, new values, new beauty. His influence in broadening our literary culture, in deepening our sympathy for the poets of other lands, and in making our own poetry a true expression of American feeling is beyond measure.

**Minor Poems.** It was by his first simple poems that Longfellow won the hearts of his people, and by them he is still most widely and gratefully remembered. To name these old favorites ("The Day is Done," "Resignation," "Ladder of St. Augustine," "Rainy Day," "Footsteps of Angels," "Light of Stars," "Reaper and the Flowers," "Hymn to the Night," "Midnight Mass," "Excelsior," "Village Blacksmith," "Psalm of Life") is to list many of the poems that are remembered and quoted wherever in the round world the English language is spoken.

Ordinarily such poems are accepted at their face value as a true expression of human sentiment; but if we examine them critically, remembering the people for whom they were written, we may discover the secret of their popularity. The

Anglo-Saxons are first a busy and then a religious folk ; when their day's work is done their thoughts turn naturally **Vesper Songs** to higher matters ; and any examination of Longfellow's minor works shows that a large proportion of them deal with the thoughts or feelings of men at the close of day. Such poems would be called *Abendlieder* in German ; a good Old-English title for them would be "Evensong" ; and both titles suggest the element of faith or worship. In writing these poems Longfellow had, unconsciously perhaps, the same impulse that leads one man to sing a hymn and another to say his prayers when the day is done. Because he expresses this almost universal feeling simply and reverently, his work is dear to men and women who would not have the habit of work interfere with the divine instinct of worship.

Further examination of these minor poems shows them to be filled with sentiment that often slips over the verge of sentimentality. The sentiments expressed are not of the exalted, imaginative kind ; they are the sentiments of plain people who feel deeply but who can seldom express their feeling. Now, most people are sentimental (though we commonly try to hide the fact, more's the pity), and we are at heart grateful to the poet who says for us in simple, musical language what we are unable or ashamed to say for ourselves. In a word, the popularity of Longfellow's poems rests firmly on the humanity of the poet.

Besides these vesper songs are a hundred other short poems, among which the reader must make his own selection. The **Typical Poems** ballads should not be neglected, for Longfellow knew how to tell a story in verse. If he were too prone to add a moral to his tale (a moral that does not speak for itself were better omitted), we can overlook the fault, since his moral was a good one and his readers liked it. The "occasional" poems, also, written to celebrate persons or events (such as "Building of the Ship," "Hanging of the Crane," "Morituri Salutamus," "Bells of Lynn," "Robert

Burns," "Chamber over the Gate") well deserved the welcome which the American people gave them. And the sonnets (such as "Three Friends," "Victor and Vanquished," "My Books," "Nature," "Milton," "President Garfield," "Giotto's Tower") are not only the most artistic of Longfellow's works but rank very near to the best sonnets in the English language.

**American Idyls.** In the same spirit in which Tennyson wrote his *English Idyls* the American poet sent forth certain works reflecting the beauty of common life on this side of the ocean; and though he never collected or gave them a name, we think of them as his "American Idyls." Many of his minor poems belong to this class, but we are thinking especially of *Evangeline*, *Miles Standish* and *Hiawatha*. The last-named, with its myths and legends clustering around one heroic personage, is commonly called an epic; but its songs of Chibiabos, Minnehaha, Nokomis and the little Hiawatha are more like idyllic pictures of the original Americans.

*Evangeline: a Tale of Acadie* (1847) met the fate of Longfellow's earlier poems in that it was promptly attacked by

**Evangeline** a few critics while a multitude of people read it with delight. Its success may be explained on four counts. First, it is a charming story, not a "modern" or realistic but a tender, pathetic story such as we read in old romances, and such as young people will cherish so long as they remain young people. Second, it had a New World setting, one that was welcomed in Europe because it offered readers a new stage, more vast, shadowy, mysterious, than that to which they were accustomed; and doubly welcomed here because it threw the glamor of romance over familiar scenes which deserved but had never before found their poet. Third, this old romance in a new setting was true to universal human nature; its sentiments of love, faith and deathless loyalty were such as make the heart beat faster wherever true hearts are found. Finally, it was written in an unusual verse form, the unrimed hexameter, which Longfellow handled as well, let

us say, as most other English poets who have tried to use that alluring but difficult measure. For hexameters are like the Italian language, which is very easy to "pick up," but which few foreigners ever learn to speak with the rhythm and melody of a child of Tuscany.

Longfellow began his hexameters fairly well, as witness the opening lines of *Evangeline*:

This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,  
Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight,  
Stand like Druids of old, with voices sad and prophetic,  
Stand like harpers hoar, with beards that rest on their bosoms.  
Loud from its rocky caverns the deep-voiced neighboring ocean  
Speaks, and in accents disconsolate answers the wail of the forest.

Occasionally also he produced a very good but not quite perfect line or passage:

And as the voice of the priest repeated the service of sorrow,  
So with a mournful sound, like the voice of a vast congregation,  
Solemnly answered the sea, and mingled its roar with the dirges.

One must confess, however, that such passages are exceptional, and that one must change the proper stress of a word too frequently to be enthusiastic over Longfellow's hexameters. Some of his lines halt or hobble, refusing to move to the chosen measure, and others lose all their charm when spoken aloud:

When she had passed it seemed like the ceasing of exquisite music.

That line has been praised by critics, but one must believe that they never pronounced it. To voice its sibilant hissing is to understand the symbol for a white man in the Indian sign language; that is, two fingers of a hand extended before the face, like the fork of a serpent's tongue.<sup>1</sup> On the whole, Longfellow's verse should be judged not by itself but as a part

<sup>1</sup> This curious symbol, a snake's tongue to represent an Englishman, was invented by some Indian whose ears were pained by a language in which the *s* sounds occur too frequently. Our plurals are nearly all made that way, unfortunately; but Longfellow was able to make a hissing line without the use of a single plural.

of the tale he was telling. Holmes summed up the first impression of many readers by saying that he found these "brimming lines" an excellent medium for a charming story.

That is more than one can truthfully say of the next important idyl, *The Courtship of Miles Standish* (1858). The story is a good one and, more than all the histories, has awakened a romantic interest in the Pilgrims; but its unhappy hexameters go jolting along, continually upsetting the musical rhythm, until we wish that the tale had been told in either prose or poetry.

*The Song of Hiawatha* (1855) was Longfellow's greatest work, and by it he will probably be longest remembered as a <sup>Song of</sup> <sup>Hiawatha</sup> world poet. The materials for this poem, its musical names, its primitive traditions, its fascinating folklore, were all taken from Schoolcraft's books about the Ojibway Indians; its peculiar verse form, with its easy rhythm and endless repetition, was copied from the *Kalevala*, the national epic of Finland. Material and method, the tale and the verse form, were finely adapted to each other; and though Longfellow showed no originality in *Hiawatha*, his poetic talent or genius appears in this: that these tales of childhood are told in a childlike spirit; that these forest legends have the fragrance of hemlock in them; and that as we read them, even now, we seem to see the wigwam with its curling smoke, and beyond the wigwam the dewy earth, the shining river, and the blue sky with its pillars of tree trunks and its cloud of rustling leaves. The simplicity and naturalness of primitive folklore is in this work of Longfellow, who of a hundred writers at home and abroad was the first to reveal the poetry in the soul of an Indian.

As the poem is well known we forbear quotation; as it is too long, perhaps, we express a personal preference in naming "Hiawatha's Childhood," his "Friends," his "Fishing" and his "Wooing" as the parts most likely to please the beginner. The best that can be said of *Hiawatha* is that it adds a new

tale to the world's storybook. That book of the centuries has only a few stories, each of which portrays a man from birth to death, fronting the problems of this life, meeting its joy or sorrow in man fashion, and then setting his face bravely to "Ponemah," the Land of the Hereafter. That Longfellow added a chapter to the volume which preserves the stories of Ulysses, Beowulf, Arthur and Roland is undoubtedly his best or most enduring achievement.

**His Experimental Works.** Unless the student wants to encourage a sentimental mood by reading *Hyperion*, Longfellow's prose works need not detain us. Much more valuable and readable are his translations from various European languages, and of these his metrical

version of *The Divine Comedy* of Dante is most notable. He attempted also several dramatic works, among which *The Spanish Student* (1843) is still readable, though not very convincing. In *Christus: a Mystery* he attempted a miracle play of three acts, dealing with Christianity in the apostolic, medieval and modern eras; but not even his admirers were satisfied with the result. "The Golden Legend" (one version of which Caxton printed on the first English press, and which a score of different poets have paraphrased) is the only part of *Christus* that may interest young readers by its romantic portrayal of the Middle Ages. To name such works is to suggest Longfellow's



THE TAPROOM, WAYSIDE INN, SUDBURY

varied interests and his habit of experimenting with any subject or verse form that attracted him in foreign literatures.

The *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (1863-1873) is the most popular of Longfellow's miscellaneous works. Here are a score of stories from ancient or modern sources, as told by a circle of the poet's friends in the Red Horse Inn, at Sudbury. The title suggests at once the *Canterbury Tales* of Chaucer; but it would be unwise to make any comparison between the two works or the two poets. The ballad of "Paul Revere's Ride" is the best known of the *Wayside Inn* poems; the Viking tales of "The Saga of King Olaf" are the most vigorous; the mellow coloring of the Middle Ages appears in such stories as "The Legend Beautiful" and "The Bell of Atri."

**Characteristics of Longfellow.** The broad sympathy of Longfellow, which made him at home in the literatures of a dozen nations, was one of his finest qualities. He lived in Cambridge; he wrote in English; he is called the poet of the American home; but had he lived in Finland and written in a Scandinavian tongue, his poems must still appeal to us. Indeed, so simply did he reflect the sentiments of the human heart that Finland or any other nation might gladly class him among its poets.

For example, many Englishmen have written about their Wellington, but, as Hearn says, not even Tennyson's poem on **A Poet of all Peoples** the subject is quite equal to Longfellow's "Warden of the Cinque Ports." The spirit of the Spanish missions, with their self-sacrificing monks and their soldiers "with hearts of fire and steel," is finely reflected in "The Bells of San Blas." The half-superstitious loyalty of the Russian peasant for his hereditary ruler has never been better reflected than in "The White Czar." The story of Belisarius has been told in scores of histories and books of poetry; but you will feel a deeper sympathy for the neglected old Roman soldier in Longfellow's poem than in anything else you may find on the same theme. And there are many other foreign

heroes or brave deeds that find beautiful expression in the verse of our American poet. Of late it has become almost a critical habit to disparage Longfellow; but no critic has pointed out another poet who has reflected with sympathy and understanding the feelings of so many widely different peoples.

Naturally such a poet had his limitations. In comparison with Chaucer, for example, we perceive instantly that Longfellow knew only one side of life, the better side. Unhappy or rebellious or turbulent souls were beyond his ken. He wrote only for those who work by day and sometimes go to evensong at night, who hopefully train their children or reverently bury their dead, and who cleave to a writer that speaks for them the fitting word of faith or cheer or consolation on every proper occasion. As humanity is largely made of such men and women, Longfellow will always be a popular poet. For him, with his serene outlook, there were not nine Muses but only three, and their names were Faith, Hope and Charity.

Concerning his faults, perhaps the most illuminating thing that can be said is that critics emphasize and ordinary readers **Poetic Faults** ignore them. The reason for this is that every poem has two elements, form and content: a critic looks chiefly at the one, an ordinary reader at the other. Because the form of Longfellow's verse is often faulty it is easy



LONGFELLOW'S LIBRARY IN CRAIGIE  
HOUSE, CAMBRIDGE

to criticize him, to show that he copies the work of others, that he lacks originality, that his figures are often forced or questionable; but the reader, the young reader especially, may be too much interested in the charm of the poet's story or the truth of his sentiment to dissect his poetic figures. Thus, in the best-known of his earlier poems, "A Psalm of Life," he uses the famous metaphor of "footprints on the sands of time." That is so bad a figure that to analyze is to reject it; yet it never bothers young people, who would understand the poet and like him just as well even had he written "sign-boards" instead of "footprints." The point is that Longfellow is so obviously a true and pleasant poet that his faults easily escape attention unless we look for them. There is perhaps no better summary of our poet's qualities than to record again the simple fact that he is the poet of young people, to whom sentiment is the very breath of life. Should you ask the reason for his supremacy in this respect, the answer is a paradox. Longfellow was not an originator; he had no new song to sing, no new tale to tell. He was the poet of old heroes, old legends, old sentiments and ideals. Therefore he is the poet of youth.

#### JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER (1807-1892)

The strange mixture of warrior and peace lover in Whittier has led to a strange misjudgment of his work. From the obscurity of a New England farm he emerged as the champion of the Abolitionist party, and for thirty tumultuous years his poems were as war cries. By such work was he judged as "the trumpeter of a cause," and the judgment stood between him and his audience when he sang not of a cause but of a country. Even at the present time most critics speak of Whittier as "the antislavery poet." Stedman, for example, focuses our attention on certain lyrics of reform which he calls "words wrung from the nation's heart"; but the plain

fact is that only a small part of the nation approved these lyrics or took any interest in the poet who wrote them.

Such was Whittier on one side, a militant poet of reform, sending forth verses that had the brattle of trumpets and the waving of banners in them :

Lift again the stately emblem on the Bay State's rusted shield,  
Give to Northern winds the Pine Tree on our banner's tattered field.  
Sons of men who sat in council with their Bibles round the board,  
Answering England's royal missive with a firm, "Thus saith the Lord!"  
Rise again for home and freedom! set the battle in array!  
What the fathers did of old time we their sons must do to-day.

On the other side he was a Friend, or Quaker, and the peaceful spirit of his people found expression in lyrics of faith that have no equal in our poetry. He was also a patriot to the core. He loved America with a profound love; her ideals, her traditions, her epic history were in his blood, and he glorified them in ballads and idyls that reflect the very spirit of brave Colonial days. To judge Whittier as a trumpeter, therefore, is to neglect all that is important in his work; for his reform poems merely awaken the dying echoes of party clamor, while his ballads and idyls belong to the whole American people, and his hymns of faith to the wider audience of humanity.

**Life.** The span of Whittier's life was almost the span of the nineteenth century. He was born (1807) in the homestead of his ancestors at Haverhill, Massachusetts, and spent his formative years working in the fields by day, reading beside the open fire at night, and spending a few terms in a "destrict" school presided over by teachers who came or went with the spring. His schooling was, therefore, of the scantiest kind; his real education came from a noble home, from his country's history, from his toil and outdoor life with its daily contact with nature. The love of home and of homely virtues, the glorification of manhood and womanhood, the pride of noble traditions, and always a background of meadow or woodland or sounding sea,—these were the subjects of Whittier's best verse, because these were the things he knew most intimately.

It was a song of Burns that first turned Whittier to poetry; but hardly had he begun to write songs of his own when Garrison, the **First Verses** antislavery agitator, turned his thought from the peaceful farm to the clamoring world beyond. Attracted by certain verses (Whittier's sister Elizabeth had sent them secretly to Garrison's paper) the editor came over to see his contributor and found to his surprise a country lad who was in evident need of education. Instead of asking for more poetry, therefore, Garrison awakened the boy's ambition. For two terms he attended the Haverhill Academy, supporting himself meanwhile by making shoes. Then his labor was needed at home; but finding his health too delicate for farm work he chose other occupations and contributed manfully to the support of his family.

For several years thereafter Whittier was like a man trying to find himself. He did factory work; he edited newspapers; he showed a talent for political leadership; he made poems which he sold at a price to remind him of what he had once received for making shoes. While poetry and politics both called to him alluringly a crisis

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

arose; Garrison summoned him; and with a sad heart, knowing that he left all hope of political or literary success behind, he went over to the Abolitionist party. That was in 1833, when Whittier was twenty-six years old. At that time the Abolitionists were detested in the North as well as in the South, and to join them was to become an outcast.

Then came the militant period of Whittier's life. He became editor of antislavery journals; he lectured in the cause; he was stoned for his utterances; his printing shop was burned by a mob. Meanwhile his poems were sounding abroad like trumpet blasts, making friends, making enemies. It was a passionate age, when



political enemies were hated like Hessians, but Whittier was always chivalrous with his opponents. Read his "Randolph of Roanoke" for a specific example. His "Laus Deo" (1865), a chant of exultation written when he heard the bells ringing the news of the constitutional amendment prohibiting slavery, was the last poem of this period of storm and stress.

In the following year Whittier produced *Snow-Bound*, his masterpiece. Though he had been writing for half a century, he had never won either fame or money by his verse; but the publication of this



OAK KNOLL, WHITTIER'S HOME, DANVERS, MASSACHUSETTS

beautiful idyl placed him in the front rank of American poets. Thereafter he was a national figure, and the magazines which once scorned his verses were now most eager to print them. So he made an end of the poverty which had been his portion since childhood.

For the remainder of his life he lived serenely at Amesbury, for the most part, in a modest house presided over by a relative. He wrote poetry now more carefully, for a wider audience, and every few years saw another little volume added to his store: *Ballads of New England*, *Miriam and Other Poems*, *Hazel Blossoms*, *Poems of Nature*, *St. Gregory's Quest*, *At Sundown*. When he died (1892) he was honored not so widely perhaps as Longfellow, but more deeply, as we honor those whose peace has been won

through manful strife. Holmes, the ready poet of all occasions, expressed a formal but sincere judgment in the lines:

Best loved and saintliest of our singing train,  
Earth's noblest tributes to thy name belong:  
A lifelong record closed without a stain,  
A blameless memory shrined in deathless song.

**Earlier Works.**<sup>1</sup> In Whittier's poetry we note three distinct stages, and note also that he was on the wrong trail until he followed his own spirit. His earliest work was inspired by Burns, but this was of no consequence. Next he fell under the spell of Scott and wrote "Mogg Megone" and "The Bridal of Pennacook." These Indian romances in verse are too much influenced by Scott's border poems and also by sentimental novels of savage life, such as Mrs. Child's *Hobomok*; they do not ring true, and in this respect are like almost everything else in literature on the subject of the Indians.

In *Voices of Freedom* (1849) and other poems inspired by the antislavery campaign Whittier for the first time came close to his own age. He was no longer an echo but a Reform Poems voice, a man's voice, shouting above a tumult. He spoke not for the nation but for a party; and it was inevitable that his reform lyrics should fall into neglect with the occasions that called them forth. They are interesting now not as poems but as sidelights on a critical period of our history. Their intensely passionate quality appears in "Faneuil Hall," "Song of the Free," "The Pine Tree," "Randolph of Roanoke" and "The Farewell of an Indian Slave Mother."

There is a fine swinging rhythm in these poems, in "Massachusetts to Virginia" especially, which recalls Macaulay's "Armada"; and two of them at least show astonishing power and vitality. One is "Laus Deo," to which we have referred in our story of the poet's life. The other is "Ichabod" (1850),

<sup>1</sup> Though we are concerned here with Whittier's poetry, we should at least mention certain of his prose works, such as *Legends of New England*, *Leaves from Margaret Smith's Journal* and *Old Portraits and Modern Sketches*. The chief value of these is in their pictures of Colonial life.

written after the "Seventh of March Speech" of Webster, when that statesman seemed to have betrayed the men who elected and trusted him. Surprise, anger, scorn, indignation, sorrow,—all these emotions were loosed in a flood after Webster's speech; but Whittier waited till he had fused them into one emotion, and when his slow words fell at last they fell with the weight of judgment and the scorching of fire upon their victim. If words could kill a man, these surely are the words. "Ichabod" is the most powerful poem of its kind in our language; but it is fearfully unjust to Webster. Those who read it should read also "The Lost Occasion," written thirty years later, which Whittier placed next to "Ichabod" in the final edition of his poems. So he tried to right a wrong (unfortunately after the victim was dead) by offering generous tribute to the statesman he had once misjudged.

**Ballads and American Idyls.** Whittier's manly heart and his talent for flowing verse made him an excellent ballad writer; but his work in this field is so different from that of his predecessors that he came near to inventing a new type of poetry. Thus, many of the old ballads celebrate the bravery that mounts with fighting; but Whittier always lays emphasis on the higher quality that we call moral courage. "Barclay of Ury" will illustrate our criticism: the verse has a martial swing; the hero is a veteran who has known the lust of battle; but his courage now appears in self-mastery, in the ability to bear in silence the jeers of a mob. Again, the old ballad aims to tell a story, nothing else, and drives straight to its mark; but Whittier portrays the whole landscape and background of the action. He deals largely with Colonial life in New England, and his descriptions of place and people are unrivaled in our poetry. Read one of his typical ballads, "The Wreck of Rivermouth" or "The Witch's Daughter" or "The Garrison of Cape Ann" or "Skipper Ireson's Ride," and see how closely he identifies himself with the place and time of his story.

There is one quality, however, in which our Quaker poet resembles the old ballad makers; namely, his intense patriotism; and this recalls the fact that ballads were the first histories, the first expression not only of brave deeds but of the national pride which the deeds symbolized. Though Whittier keeps himself modestly in the background, as a story-teller ought to do, he can never quite repress the love of his native land or the quickened heartbeats that set

Patriotic  
Quality



STREET IN OLD MARBLEHEAD

Skipper Ireson's home on extreme right

his verse marching as if to the drums. This patriotism, though intense, was never intolerant but rather sympathetic with men of other lands, as appears in "The Pipes at Lucknow," a ballad dealing with a dramatic incident of the Sepoy Rebellion. The Scotsman who could read that ballad unmoved, without a kindling of the eye or a stirring of the heart, would be unworthy of his clan or country.

Even better than Whittier's ballads are certain narrative poems reflecting the life of simple people, to which we give

the name of idyls. "Telling the Bees," "In School Days," "My Playmate," "Maud Muller," "The Barefoot Boy,"—there are no other American poems quite like these, none so tender, none written with such perfect sympathy. Some of them are like photographs; and the lens that gathered them was not a glass but a human heart. Others sing the emotion of love as only Whittier, the Galahad of poets, could have sung it,—as in this stanza from "*A Sea Dream*":

Draw near, more near, forever dear!  
Where'er I rest or roam,  
Or in the city's crowded streets,  
Or by the blown sea foam,  
The thought of thee is home!

**Snow-Bound.** The best of Whittier's idyls is *Snow-Bound* (1866), into which he gathered a boy's tenderest memories. In naming this as the best poem in the language on the subject of home we do not offer a criticism but an invitation. Because all that is best in human life centers in the ideal of home, and because Whittier reflected that ideal in a beautiful way, *Snow-Bound* should be read if we read nothing else of American poetry. There is perhaps only one thing to prevent this idyl from becoming a universal poem: its natural setting can be appreciated only by those who live within the snow line, who have seen the white flakes gather and drift, confining every family to the circle of its own hearth fire in what Emerson calls "the tumultuous privacy of storm."

The plan of the poem is simplicity itself. It opens with a description of a snowstorm that thickens with the December night. The inmates of an old farmhouse gather about the open fire, and Whittier describes them one by one, how they looked to the boy (for *Snow-Bound* is a recollection of boyhood), and what stories they told to reveal their interests. The rest of the poem is a reverie, as of one no longer a boy, who looks into his fire and sees not the fire-pictures but those other scenes or portraits that are graved deep in every human heart.

To praise such a work is superfluous, and to criticize its artless sincerity is beyond our ability. Many good writers have explained the poem; yet still its deepest charm **Charm of Snow-Bound** escapes analysis, perhaps because it has no name. The best criticism that the present writer ever heard on the subject came from a Habitant farmer in the Province of Quebec, a simple, unlettered man, who was a poet at heart but who would have been amazed had anyone told him so. His children, who were learning English literature through the happy medium of *Evangeline* and *Snow-Bound*, brought the latter poem home from school, and the old man would sit smoking his pipe and listening to the story. When they read of the winter scenes, of the fire roaring its defiance up the chimney-throat at the storm without,—

What matter how the night behaved?  
 What matter how the north-wind raved?  
 Blow high, blow low, not all its snow  
 Could quench our hearth-fire's ruddy glow,—

then he would stir in his chair, make his pipe glow fiercely, and blow a cloud of smoke about his head. But in the following scene, with its memories of the dead and its immortal hope, he would sit very still, as if listening to exquisite music. When asked why he liked the poem his face lighted: "W'y I lak heem, M'sieu Whittier? I lak heem 'cause he speak de true. He know de storm, and de leetle *cabane*, and heart of de boy an' hees moder. *Oui, oui*, he know de man also."

Nature, home, the heart of a boy and a man and a mother,—the poet who can reflect such elemental matters so that the simple of earth understand and love their beauty deserves the critic's best tribute of silence.

**Poems of Faith and Nature.** Aside from the reform poems it is hard to group Whittier's works, which are all alike in that they portray familiar scenes against a natural background. In his *Tent on the Beach* (1867) he attempted a collection of tales in the manner of Longfellow's *Wayside Inn*, but of these only

one or two ballads, such as "Abraham Davenport" and "The Wreck of Rivermouth," are now treasured. The best part of the book is the "Prelude," which pictures the poet among his friends and records his impressions of sky and sea and shore.

The outdoor poems of Whittier are interesting, aside from their own beauty, as suggesting two poetic conceptions of <sup>Two Views of Nature</sup> nature which have little in common. The earlier regards nature as a mistress to be loved or a divinity to be worshiped for her own sake; she has her own laws or mercies, and man is but one of her creatures. The Anglo-Saxon scops viewed nature in this way; so did Bryant, in whose "Forest Hymn" is the feeling of primitive ages. Many modern poets (and novelists also, like Scott and Cooper) have outgrown this conception; they regard nature as a kind of stage for the drama of human life, which is all-important.

Whittier belongs to this later school; he portrays nature magnificently, but always as the background for some human incident, sad or tender or heroic, which appears to us more real because viewed in its natural setting. Note in "The Wreck of Rivermouth," for example, how the merry party in their sailboat, the mowers on the salt marshes, the "witch" mumbling her warning, the challenge of a careless girl, the skipper's fear, the river, the breeze, the laughing sea,—everything is exactly as it should be. It is this humanized view of the natural world which makes Whittier's ballads unique and which gives deeper meaning to his "Hampton Beach," "Among the Hills," "Trailing Arbutus," "The Vanishers" and other of his best nature poems.

Our reading of Whittier should not end until we are familiar with "The Eternal Goodness," "Trust," "My Soul and I," "The Prayer of Agassiz" and a few more <sup>Whittier's Creed</sup> of his hymns of faith. Our appreciation of such hymns will be more sympathetic if we remember, first, that Whittier came of ancestors whose souls approved the opening proposition of the Declaration of Independence; and second,

that he belonged to the Society of Friends, who believed that God revealed himself directly to every human soul (the "inner light" they called it), and that a man's primal responsibility was to God and his own conscience. The creed of Whittier may therefore be summarized in two articles: "I believe in the Divine love and in the equality of men." The latter article appears in all his poems; the former is crystallized in "The Eternal Goodness," a hymn so trustful and reverent that it might well be the evensong of humanity.

**Characteristics of Whittier.** One may summarize Whittier in the statement that he is the poet of the home and the hills, and of that freedom without which the home loses its chief joy and the hill its inspiration. In writing of such themes Whittier failed to win the highest honors of a poet; and the failure was due not to his lack of culture, as is sometimes alleged (for there is no other culture equal to right living), but rather to the stern conditions of his life, to his devotion to duty, to his struggle for liberty, to his lifelong purpose of helping men by his singing. Great poems are usually the result of seclusion, of aloofness, but Whittier was always a worker in the world.

His naturalness is perhaps his best poetic virtue. There is in his verse a spontaneous "singing" quality which leaves

**A Natural Singer** the impression that poetry was his native language.

It is easy to understand why Burns first attracted him, for both poets were natural singers who remind us of what Bede wrote of Cædmon: "He learned not the art of poetry from men." Next to his spontaneity is his rare simplicity, his gift of speaking straight from a heart that never grew old. Sometimes his simplicity is as artless as that of a child, as in "Maud Muller"; generally it is noble, as in his modest "Proem" to *Voices of Freedom*; occasionally it is passionate, as in the exultant cry of "Laus Deo"; and at times it rises to the simplicity of pure art, as in "Telling the Bees." The last-named poem portrays an old Colonial custom which

provided that when death came to a farmhouse the bees must be told and their hives draped in mourning. It portrays also, as a perfect, natural background, the path to Whittier's home and his sister's old-fashioned flower garden, in which the daffodils still bloom where she planted them long ago.

That Whittier was not a great poet, as the critics assure us, may be frankly admitted. That he had elements of greatness

**The Man and the Poet** is also without question; and precisely for this reason, because his power is so often manifest in noble or exquisite passages, there is disappointment in reading him when we stumble upon bad rimes, careless workmanship, mishandling of his native speech. Our experience here is probably like that of Whittier's friend Garrison. The latter had read certain poems that attracted him; he came quickly to see the poet; and out from under the barn, his clothes sprinkled with hayseed, crawled a shy country lad who explained bashfully that he had been hunting hens' nests. Anything could be forgiven after that; interest in the boy would surely temper criticism of the poet.

Even so our present criticism of Whittier's verse must include certain considerations of the man who wrote it: that he smacked of his native soil; that his education was scanty and hardly earned; that he used words as his father and mother used them, and was not ashamed of their rural accent. His own experience, moreover, had weathered him until he seemed part of a rugged landscape. He knew life, and he loved it. He had endured poverty, and glorified it. He had been farm hand, shoemaker, self-supporting student, editor of country newspapers, local politician, champion of slaves, worker for reform, defender of a hopeless cause that by the awful judgment of war became a winning cause. And always and everywhere he had been a man, one who did his duty as he saw it, spake truth as he believed it, and kept his conscience clean, his heart pure, his faith unshaken. All this was in his verse and ennobled even his faults, which were

part of his plain humanity. As Longfellow was by study of European literatures the poet of books and culture, so Whittier was by experience the poet of life. The homely quality of his verse, which endears it to common men, is explained on the ground that he was nearer than any other American poet to the body and soul of his countrymen.

### JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL (1819-1891)

The work of Lowell is unusual and his rank or position hard to define. Though never a great or even a popular writer, he was regarded for a considerable part of his life as the most prominent man of letters in America. At the present time his reputation is still large, but historians find it somewhat easier to praise his works than to read them. As poet, critic, satirist, editor and teacher he loomed as a giant among his contemporaries, overtopping Whittier and Longfellow at one time; but he left no work comparable to *Snow-Bound* or *Hiawatha*, and one is puzzled to name any of his poems or essays that are fairly certain to give pleasure. To read his volumes is to meet a man of power and brilliant promise, but the final impression is that the promise was not fulfilled, that the masterpiece of which Lowell was capable was left unwritten.

**Biographical Sketch.** Lowell came from a distinguished family that had "made history" in America. His father was a cultured clergyman; he grew up in a beautiful home, "Elmwood," in the college town of Cambridge; among his first companions were the noble books that filled the shelves of the family library. From the beginning, therefore, he was inclined to letters; and though he often turned aside for other matters, his first and last love was the love of poetry.

At fifteen he entered Harvard, where he read almost everything, he said, except the books prescribed by the faculty. Then he studied law and opened an office in Boston, where he found few clients, being more interested in writing verses than in his profession. With his marriage in 1844 the first strong purpose seems to have entered his

indolent life. His wife was zealous in good works, and presently Lowell, who had gayly satirized all reformers, joined in the antislavery campaign and proceeded to make as many enemies as friends by his reform poems.

Followed then a period of hard, purposeful work, during which he supported himself by editing *The Pennsylvania Freeman* and by writing *Varied Tasks* for the magazines. In 1848, his banner year, he published his best volume of *Poems*, *Sir Launfal, A Fable for Critics* and the first series of *The Biglow Papers*. It was not these volumes, however, but a series of brilliant lectures on the English poets that caused Lowell to be called to the chair in Harvard which Longfellow had resigned. He prepared for this work by studying abroad, and for some twenty years thereafter he gave courses in English, Italian, Spanish and German literatures. For a part of this time he was also editor in turn of *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The North American Review*.

In the simpler days of the republic, when the first question asked of a

**Life Abroad** diplomat was not whether he had money enough to entertain society in a proper style, the profession of letters was honored by sending literary men to represent America in foreign courts, and Lowell's prominence was recognized by his appointment as ambassador to Spain (1877) and to England (1880). It was in this patriotic service abroad that he won his greatest honors. In London especially he made his power felt as an American who loved his country, as a democrat who believed in democracy, and as a cultured gentleman who understood Anglo-Saxon life because of his familiarity with the poetry in which that life is most clearly reflected. Next to keeping silence about his proper business, perhaps the chief requirement



JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

of an ambassador is to make speeches about everything else, and no other foreign speaker was ever listened to with more pleasure than the witty and cultured Lowell. One who summed up his diplomatic triumph said tersely that he found the Englishmen strangers and left them all cousins.

He was recalled from this service in 1885. The remainder of his life was spent teaching at Harvard, writing more poetry and editing his numerous works. His first volume of poems, *A Year's Life*, was published in 1841; his last volume, *Heartsease and Rue*, appeared almost half a century later, in 1888. That his death occurred in the same house in which he was born and in which he had spent the greater part of his life is an occurrence so rare in America that it deserves a poem of commemoration.

**Lowell's Poetry.** There are golden grains everywhere in Lowell's verse but never a continuous vein of metal. In other words, even his best work is notable for occasional lines rather than for sustained excellence. As a specific example study the "Commemoration Ode," one of the finest poems inspired by the Civil War. The occasion of this ode, to commemorate the college students who had given their lives for their country, was all that a poet might wish; the brilliant audience that gathered at Cambridge was most inspiring; and beyond that local audience stood a nation in mourning, a nation which had just lost a million of its sons in a mighty conflict. It was such an occasion as Lowell loved, and one who reads the story of his life knows how earnestly he strove to meet it. When the reading of his poem was finished his audience called it "a noble effort," and that is precisely the trouble with the famous ode; it is too plainly an effort. It does not sing, does not overflow from a full heart, does not speak the inevitable, satisfying word. In consequence (and perhaps this criticism applies to most ambitious odes) we are rather glad when the "effort" is at an end. Yet there are excellent passages in the poem, notably the sixth and the last stanzas, one with its fine tribute to Lincoln, the other expressive of deathless loyalty to one's native land.

The best of Lowell's lyrics may be grouped in two classes, the first dealing with his personal joy or grief, the second with the feelings of the nation. Typical of the former Lyrics are "The First Snowfall" and a few other lyrics reflecting the poet's sorrow for the loss of a little daughter,—simple, human poems, in refreshing contrast with most others of Lowell, which strive for brilliancy. The best of the national lyrics is "The Present Crisis" (1844). This was at first a party poem, a ringing appeal issued during the turmoil occasioned by the annexation of Texas; but now, with the old party issues forgotten, we can all read it with pleasure as a splendid expression of the American heart and will in every crisis of our national history.

In the nature lyrics we have a double reflection, one of the external world, the other of a poet who could not be single-minded, and who was always confusing his own impressions of nature or humanity with those other impressions which he found reflected in poetry. Read the charming "To a Dandelion," for example, and note how Lowell cannot be content with his

Dear common flower that grow'st beside the way,  
Fringing the dusty road with harmless gold,

but must bring in Eldorado and twenty other poetic allusions to glorify a flower which has no need of external glory. Then for comparison read Bryant's "Fringed Gentian" and see how the elder poet, content with the flower itself, tells you very simply how its beauty appeals to him. Or read "An Indian-Summer Reverie" with its scattered lines of gold, and note how Lowell cannot say what he feels in his own heart but must search everywhere for poetic images; and then, because he cannot find exactly what he seeks or, more likely, because he finds a dozen tempting allusions where one is plenty, he goes on and on in a vain quest that ends by leaving himself and his reader unsatisfied.

The most popular of Lowell's works is *The Vision of Sir Launfal* (1848), in which he invents an Arthurian kind of legend of the search for the Holy Grail. Most of Sir Launfal his long poems are labored, but this seems to have been written in a moment of inspiration. The "Prelude" begins almost spontaneously, and when it reaches the charming passage "And what is so rare as a day in June?" the verse fairly begins to sing,—a rare occurrence with Lowell. Critical readers may reasonably object to the poet's moralizing, to his imperfect lines and to his setting of an Old World legend of knights and castles in a New World landscape; but uncritical readers rejoice in a moral feeling that is fine and true, and are content with a good story and a good landscape without inquiring whether the two belong together. Moreover, *Sir Launfal* certainly serves the first purpose of poetry in that it gives pleasure and so deserves its continued popularity among young readers.

Two satiric poems that were highly prized when they were first published, and that are still formally praised by historians Satires who do not read them, are *A Fable for Critics* and *The Biglow Papers*. The former is a series of doggerel verses filled with grotesque puns and quips aimed at American authors who were prominent in 1848. The latter, written in a tortured, "Yankee" dialect, is made up of political satires and conceits occasioned by the Mexican and Civil wars. Both works contain occasional fine lines and a few excellent criticisms of literature or politics, but few young readers will have patience to sift out the good passages from the mass of glittering rubbish in which they are hidden.

Much more worthy of the reader's attention are certain neglected works, such as Lowell's sonnets, his "Prometheus," "Columbus," "Agassiz," "Portrait of Dante," "Washers of the Shroud," "Under the Old Elm" (with its noble tribute to Washington) and "Stanzas on Freedom." It is a pity that

such poems, all of which contain memorable lines, should be kept from the wide audience they deserve, and largely because of the author's digressiveness. To examine them is to conclude that, like most of Lowell's works, they are not simple enough in feeling to win ordinary readers, like the poetry of Longfellow, and not perfect enough in form to excite the admiration of critics, like the best of Poe's melodies.



LOWELL'S HOUSE, CAMBRIDGE, IN WINTER

**Lowell's Prose.** In brilliancy at least Lowell has no peer among American essayists, though others excel him in the better qualities of originality or charm or vigor. The best of his prose works are the scintillating essays collected in *My Study Window* and *Among My Books*. In his political essays he looked at humanity with his own eyes, but the titles of the volumes just named indicate his chief interest as a prose writer, which was to interpret the world's books rather than the world's throbbing life. For younger readers the most pleasing of the prose works are the comparatively simple

sketches, "My Garden Acquaintance," "Cambridge Thirty Years Ago" and "On a Certain Condescension in Foreigners." In these sketches we meet the author at his best, alert, witty and so widely read that he cannot help giving a literary flavor to whatever he writes. Among the best of his essays on literary subjects are those on Chaucer, Dante, Keats, Walton and Emerson.

One who reads a typical collection of Lowell's essays is apt to be divided between open admiration and something akin to <sup>Quality of</sup> the Essays resentment. On the one hand they are brilliant, stimulating, filled with "good things"; on the other they are always digressive, sometimes fantastic and too often self-conscious; that is, they call our attention to the author rather than to his proper subject. When he writes of Dante he is concerned to reveal the soul of the Italian master; but when he writes of Milton he seems chiefly intent on showing how much more he knows than the English editor of Milton's works. When he presents Emerson he tries to make us know and admire the Concord sage; but when he falls foul of Emerson's friends, Thoreau and Carlyle, his personal prejudices are more in evidence than his impersonal judgment. In consequence, some of the literary essays are a better reflection of Lowell himself than of the men he wrote about.

An author must be finally measured, however, by his finest work, by his constant purpose rather than by his changing mood; and the finest work of Lowell, his critical studies of the elder poets and dramatists, are perhaps the most solid and the most penetrating that our country has to show. He certainly kept "the great tradition" in criticism, a tradition which enjoins us, in simple language, to seek only the best and to reverence it when we find it. As he wrote:

Great truths are portions of the soul of man;  
Great souls are portions of eternity;  
Each drop of blood that e'er through true heart ran  
With lofty message, ran for thee and me.

## OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES (1809-1894)

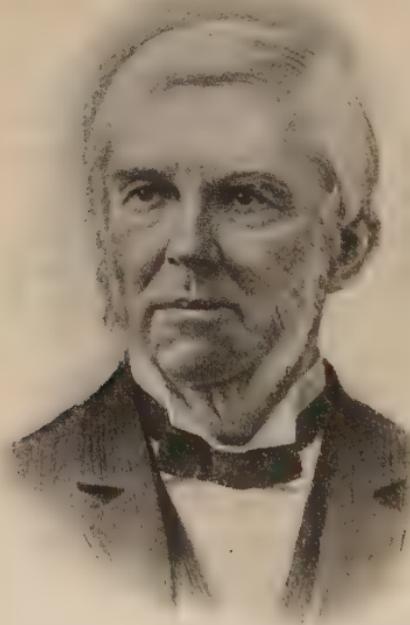
It is a sad fate for a writer to be known as a humorist; nobody will take him seriously ever afterward. Even a book suffers from such a reputation, the famous *Don Quixote* for example, which we read as a type of extravagant humor but which is in reality a tragedy, since it portrays the disillusionment of a man who believed the world to be like his own heart, noble and chivalrous, and who found it filled with villainy. Because Holmes (who was essentially a moralist and a preacher) could not repress the bubbling wit that was part of his nature, our historians must set him down as a humorist and name the "One-Hoss Shay" as his most typical work. Yet his best poems are as pathetic as "The Last Leaf," as sentimental as "The Voiceless," as patriotic as "Old Ironsides," as worshipful as the "Hymn of Trust," as nobly didactic as "The Chambered Nautilus"; his novels are studies of the obscure problems of heredity, and his most characteristic prose work, *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*, is an original commentary on almost everything under the sun.

Evidently we prize a laugh above any other product of literature, and because there is a laugh or a smile hidden in many a work of Holmes he must still keep the place assigned to him as an "American" humorist. Even so, he is perhaps our most representative writer in this field; for he is as thoroughly American as a man can be, and his rare culture and kindness are in refreshing contrast to the crude horseplay or sensationalism that is unfortunately trumpeted abroad as New World humor.

**A Placid Life.** Though Holmes never wrote a formal autobiography he left a very good reflection of himself in his works, and it is in these alone that we become acquainted with him,—a genial, witty, observant, kind-hearted and pure-hearted man whom it is good to know.

He belonged to what he called "the Brahmin caste" of intellectual aristocrats (as described in his novel, *Elsie Venner*), for he came from

an old New England family extending back to Anne Bradstreet and the governors of the Bay Colony. He was born in Cambridge; he was educated at Andover and Harvard; he spent his life in Boston, a city which satisfied him so completely that he called it "the hub of the solar system." Most ambitious writers like a large field with plenty of change or variety, but Holmes was content with a small and very select circle with himself at the center of it.



OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

For his profession he chose medicine and studied it four years, the latter half of the time in Paris. At that period his foreign training was as rare in medicine as was Longfellow's in poetry. He practiced his profession in Boston and managed to make a success of it, though patients were a little doubtful of a doctor who wrote poetry and who opened his office with the remark that "small fevers" would be "gratefully received." Also he was for thirty-five years professor of anatomy at the Harvard Medical School. What with healing or teaching or learning, this doctor might have been very busy; but he seems to have found

plenty of leisure for writing, and the inclination was always present. "Whoso has once tasted type," he said, "must indulge the taste to the end of his life."

His literary work began at twenty-one, when he wrote "Old Ironsides" in protest against the order to dismantle the frigate *Constitution*, which had made naval history in the War of 1812. That first poem, which still rings triumphantly in our ears, accomplished two things: it saved the glorious old warship, and it gave Holmes a hold on public attention which he never afterward lost. During the next twenty-five years he wrote poetry,

and was so much in demand to furnish verses for special occasions that he was a kind of poet-laureate of his college and city. He was almost fifty when the *Atlantic Monthly* was projected and Lowell demanded, as a condition of his editorship, that Holmes be engaged as the first contributor. Feeling in the mood for talk, as he commonly did, Holmes responded with *The Autocrat*. Thereafter he wrote chiefly in prose, making his greatest effort in fiction but winning more readers by his table talk in the form of essays. His last volume, *Over the Teacups*, appeared when he was past eighty years old.

We have spoken of the genial quality of Holmes as revealed in his work, but we would hardly be just to him did we fail to note his *Pet Prejudices*—pet prejudices, his suspicion of reformers, his scorn of homeopathic doctors, his violent antipathy to Calvinism. Though he had been brought up in the Calvinistic faith (his father was an old-style clergyman), he seemed to delight in clubbing or satirizing or slinging stones at it. The very mildest he could do was to refer to "yon whey-faced brother" to express his opinion of those who still clung to puritanic doctrines. Curiously enough, he still honored his father and was proud of his godly ancestors, who were all stanch Puritans. The explanation is, of course, that Holmes never understood theology, not for a moment; he only disliked it, and was consequently sure that it must be wrong and that somebody ought to put an end to it. In later years he mellowed somewhat. One cannot truthfully say that he overcame his prejudice, but he understood men better and was inclined to include even reformers and Calvinists in what he called "the larger humanity into which I was born so long ago."

**Works of Holmes.** In the field of "occasional" poetry, written to celebrate births, dedications, feasts and festivals of every kind, Holmes has never had a peer among his countrymen. He would have made a perfect poet-laureate, for he seemed to rise to every occasion and have on his lips the right word to express the feeling of the moment, whether of patriotism or sympathy or sociability. In such happy poems as "The Boys," "Bill and Jo," "All Here" and nearly forty others written for his class reunions he reflects the spirit of college men who gather annually to live the "good old days"

over again.<sup>1</sup> He wrote also some seventy other poems for special occasions, the quality of which may be judged from "Old Ironsides," "Under the Violets," "Grandmother's Story" and numerous appreciations of Lowell, Burns, Bryant, Whittier and other well-known poets.

Among poems of more general interest the best is "The Chambered Nautilus," which some read for its fine moral lesson and others for its beautiful symbolism or almost perfect workmanship. Others that deserve to be remembered are "The Last Leaf" (Lincoln's favorite), "Nearing the Snow Line," "Meeting of the Alumni," "Questions and Answers" and "The Voiceless," — none great poems but all good and very well worth the reading.

"The Deacon's Masterpiece, or the Wonderful One-Hoss Shay" is the most popular of the humorous poems. Many **Humorous Poems** readers enjoy this excellent skit without thinking what the author meant by calling it "a logical story." It is, in fact, the best pebble that he hurled from his sling against his *bête noire*; for the old "shay" which went to pieces all at once was a symbol of Calvinistic theology. That theology was called an iron chain of logic, every link so perfectly forged that it could not be broken at any point. Even so was the "shay" built, unbreakable in every single part; but when the deacon finds himself sprawling and dumfounded in the road beside the wrecked masterpiece the poet concludes :

End of the wonderful one-hoss shay.  
Logic is logic. That's all I say.

Other typical verses of the same kind are "The Height of the Ridiculous," "Daily Trials," "The Comet" and "Contentment." In the last-named poem Holmes may have been poking fun at the Brook Farmers and other enthusiasts who

<sup>1</sup> It may add a bit of interest to these poems if we remember that among the members of the Class of '29 was Samuel Smith, author of "America," a poem that now appeals to a larger audience than the class poet ever dreamed of.

were preaching the simple life. Poets and preachers of this gospel in every age are apt to insist that to find simplicity one must return to nature or the farm, or else camp in the woods and eat huckleberries, as Thoreau did; but Holmes remembered that some people must live in the city, while others incomprehensibly prefer to do so, and wrote his "Contentment" to express their idea of the simple life:

Little I ask; my wants are few;  
I only wish a hut of stone  
(A *very plain* brown stone will do)  
That I may call my own;  
And close at hand is such a one,  
In yonder street that fronts the sun.

I care not much for gold or land;  
Give me a mortgage here and there,  
Some good bank-stock, some note of hand,  
Or trifling railroad share.  
I only ask that Fortune send  
A *little* more than I shall spend.

The most readable of the prose works is *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table* (1858), a series of monologues in which The Autocrat Holmes, who was called the best talker of his age, transferred his talk in a very charming way to paper. As the book professes to record the conversation at the table of a certain Boston boarding-house, it has no particular subject; the author rambles pleasantly from one topic to another, illuminating each by his wisdom or humor or sympathy. Other books of the same series are *The Professor at the Breakfast Table*, *The Poet at the Breakfast Table* and *Over the Teacups*. Most critics consider *The Autocrat* the best and *The Poet* second best of the series; but there is a tender vein of sentiment and reminiscence in the final volume which is very attractive to older readers.

The slight story element in the breakfast-table books probably led Holmes to fiction, and he straightway produced three

novels, *Elsie Venner*, *The Guardian Angel* and *A Mortal Antipathy*. These are studies of heredity, of the physical element in morals, of the influence of mind over matter and other subjects more suitable for essays than for fiction; but a few mature readers who care less for a story than for an observation or theory of life will find *The Guardian Angel* an interesting novel. And some will surely prize *Elsie*

*Venner* for its pictures of New England life, its description of boarding school or evening party or social hierarchy, at a time when many a New England family had traditions to which it held as firmly and almost as proudly as any European court.

**The Quality of Holmes.** The intensely personal quality of the works just mentioned is their most striking characteristic; for Holmes always looks at a subject with his own eyes, and measures its effect on the reader



OLD COLONIAL DOORWAY  
Holmes's birthplace, at Cambridge

by a previous effect produced upon himself. "If I like this," he says in substance, "why, you must like it too; if it strikes me as absurd, you cannot take any other attitude; for are we not both human and therefore just alike?" It never occurred to Holmes that anybody could differ with him and still be normal; those who ventured to do so found the Doctor looking keenly at them to discover their symptoms. In an ordinary egoist or politician or theologian this would be insufferable;

but strange to say it is one of the charms of Holmes, who is so witty and pleasant-spoken that we can enjoy his dogmatism without the bother of objecting to it. In one of his books he hints that talking to certain persons is like trying to pet a squirrel; if you are wise, you will not imitate that frisky little beast but assume the purring-kitten attitude while listening to the Autocrat.

Another interesting quality of Holmes is what we may call his rationalism, his habit of taking nothing for granted, of **First-Hand Impressions** judging every matter by observation rather than by tradition or sentiment or imagination; and herein he is in marked contrast with Longfellow and other romantic writers of the period. We shall enjoy him better if we remember his bent of mind. As a boy he was fond of tools and machinery; as a man he was interested in photography, safety razors, inventions of every kind; as a physician he rebelled against drugs (then believed to have almost magical powers, and imposed on suffering stomachs in horrible doses) and observed his patients closely to discover what mentally ailed them; and as boy or man or physician he cared very little for books but a great deal for his own observation of life. Hence there is always a surprise in reading Holmes, which comes partly from his flashes of wit but more largely from his independent way of looking at things and recording his first-hand impressions. His *Autocrat* especially is a treasure and ranks with Thoreau's *Walden* among the most original books of American literature.

#### SIDNEY LANIER (1842-1881)

The name of Lanier is often associated with that of Timrod, and the two southern poets were outwardly alike in that they struggled against physical illness and mental depression; but where we see in Timrod the tragedy of a poet broken by pain and neglect, the tragedy of Lanier's life is forgotten in our

wonder at his triumph. It is doubtful if any other poet ever raised so pure a song of joy out of conditions that might well have occasioned a wail of despair.

The joyous song of Lanier is appreciated only by the few. He is not popular with either readers or critics, and the difficulty of assigning him a place or rank may be judged from

recent attempts. One history of American literature barely mentions Lanier in a slighting reference to "a small cult of poetry in parts of America";<sup>1</sup> another calls him the only southern poet who had a national horizon, and accords his work ample criticism;<sup>2</sup> a third describes him as "a true artist" having "a lyric power hardly to be found in any other American," but the brief record ends with the cutting criticism that his work is "hardly national."<sup>3</sup> And so with all other histories, one dismisses him as the author



SIDNEY LANIER

of a vague rhapsody called "The Marshes of Glynn," another exalts him as a poet who rivals Poe in melody and far surpasses him in thought or feeling. Evidently there is no settled criticism of Lanier, as of Bryant or Longfellow; he is not yet secure in his position among the elder poets, and what we record here is such a personal appreciation as any reader may formulate for himself.

<sup>1</sup> Trent, *History of American Literature* (1913), p. 471.

<sup>2</sup> Moses, *Literature of the South* (1910), pp. 358-383.

<sup>3</sup> Wendell, *Literary History of America* (1911), pp. 495-498.

**Life.** America has had its Puritan and its Cavalier writers, but seldom one who combines the Puritan's stern devotion to duty with the Cavalier's joy in nature and romance and music. Lanier was such a poet, and he owed his rare quality to a mixed ancestry. He was descended on his mother's side from Scotch-Irish and Puritan forbears, and on his father's side from Huguenot (French) exiles who were musicians at the English court. One of his ancestors, Nicholas Lanier, is described as "a musician, painter and engraver" for Queen Elizabeth and King James, and as the composer of music for some of Ben Jonson's masques.

His boyhood was spent at Macon, Georgia, where he was born in 1842. A study of that boyhood reveals certain characteristics which **Early Traits** reappear constantly in the poet's work. One was his rare purity of soul; another was his brave spirit; a third was his delight in nature; a fourth was his passion for music. At seven he made his first flute from a reed, and ever afterwards, though he learned to play many instruments, the flute was to him as a companion and a voice. With it he cheered many a weary march or hungry bivouac; through it he told all his heart to the woman he loved; by it he won a place when he had no other means of earning his bread. Hence in "The Symphony," a poem which fronts one of life's hard problems, it is the flute that utters the clearest and sweetest note.

Lanier had finished his course in Oglethorpe University (a primitive little college in Midway, Georgia) and was tutoring there when **In War Time** the war came, and the college closed its doors because teachers and students were away at the first call to join the army. For four years he was a Confederate soldier, serving in the ranks with his brother and refusing the promotion offered him for gallant conduct in the field. There was a time during this period when he might have sung like the minstrels of old, for romance had come to him with the war. By day he was fighting or scouting with his life in his hand; but when camp fires were lighted he would take his flute and slip away to serenade the girl who "waited for him till the war was over."

We mention these small incidents with a purpose. There is a delicacy of feeling in Lanier's verse which might lead a reader to assume that the poet was effeminate, when in truth he was as manly as any Norse scald or Saxon scop who ever stood beside his chief in battle. Of the war he never sang; but we find some reflection of the girl who waited in the poem "My Springs."

Lanier was at sea, as signal officer on a blockade runner, when his ship was captured by a Federal cruiser and he was sent to the military prison at Point Lookout (1864). A hard and bitter experience it was, and his only comfort was the flute which he had hidden in his ragged sleeve. When released the following year he set out on foot for his home, five hundred miles away, and reached it more dead than alive; for consumption had laid a heavy hand upon him. For weeks he was desperately ill, and during the illness his mother died of the same wasting disease; then he rose and set out bravely to earn a living, — no easy matter in a place that had suffered as Georgia had during the war.

We shall not enter into his struggle for bread, or into his wanderings in search of a place where he could breathe without pain. He was a law clerk in his father's office at Macon when, **The Gleam** knowing that he had but a slender lease of life, he made his resolve. To the remonstrances of his father he closed his ears, saying that music and poetry were calling him and he must follow the call. The superb climax of Tennyson's "Merlin and the Gleam" was in his soul:

O young mariner,  
Down to the haven  
Call your companions,  
Launch your vessel  
And crowd your canvas,  
And, ere it vanishes  
Over the margin,  
After it, follow it,  
Follow the Gleam !

Thus bravely he went northward to Baltimore, taking his flute with him. He was evidently a wonderful artist, playing not by the score but making his instrument his voice, so that his audience seemed to hear a soul speaking in melody. His was a magic flute. Soon he was supporting himself by playing in the Peabody Orchestra, living joyously meanwhile in an atmosphere of music and poetry and books; for he was always a student, determined to understand as well as to practice his art. He wrote poems, stories, anything to earn an honest dollar; he gave lectures on music and literature; he planned a score of books that he did not and could not write, for he was living in a fever of mind and body. Music and poetry were surging within him for expression; but his strength was failing, his time short.

In 1879 he was appointed lecturer at Johns Hopkins University, and for the first time he had an assured income, small, indeed, but **The Struggle** very heartening since it was enough to support his family. He began teaching with immense enthusiasm; but presently he was speaking in a whisper from an invalid's chair. Under such circumstances were uttered some of our most cheering words on art and poetry. Two years later he died in a tent among the hills, near Asheville, North Carolina, whither he had gone in a vain search for health.



THE VILLAGE OF McGAHEYSVILLE, VIRGINIA

Near here Lanier spent his summers during the last years of his life

There is in all Lanier's verse a fragmentariness, a sense of something left unsaid, which we may understand better if we remember that his heart was filled with the noblest emotions, but that when he strove to write them his pen failed for weariness. Read the daily miracle of dawn in "Sunrise," for example, and find there the waiting oaks, the stars, the tide, the marsh with its dreaming pools, light, color, fragrance, melody,— everything except that the hand which wrote the poem was too weak to guide the pencil. The rush of impressions and memories in "Sunrise," its tender beauty and vague incompleteness, as of something left unsaid, may be explained by the fact that it was Lanier's last song.

**Works of Lanier.** Many readers have grown familiar with Lanier's name in connection with *The Boy's Froissart*, *The Boy's King Arthur*, *The Boy's Mabinogion* and *The Boy's Percy*, four books in which he retold in simple language some of the old tales that are forever young. His chief prose works, *The English Novel* and *The Science of English Verse*, are of interest chiefly to critics; they need not detain us here except to note that the latter volume is devoted to Lanier's pet theory that music and poetry are governed by the same laws. Of more general interest are his scattered "Notes," which contain suggestions for many a poem that was never written, intermingled with condensed criticisms. Of the poet Swinburne he says, "He invited me to eat; the service was silver and gold, but no food therein except salt and pepper." One might say less than that with more words, or read a whole book to arrive at this summary of Whitman's style and bottomless philosophy: "Whitman is poetry's butcher; huge raw collops slashed from the rump of poetry, and never mind the gristle, is what he feeds our souls with. . . . His argument seems to be that because the Mississippi is long, therefore every American is a god."

Those who read Lanier's poems should begin with the simplest, with his love songs, "My Springs" and "In Absence," or his "Ballad of Trees and the Master," His Best Poems or his outdoor poems, such as "Tampa Robins," "Song of the Chattahoochee," "Mocking Bird," and "Evening Song." In the last-named lyrics he began the work (carried out more fully in his later poems) of interpreting in words the harmony which his sensitive ear detected in the manifold voices of nature.

Next in order are the poems in which is hidden a thought or an ideal not to be detected at first glance; for to Lanier poetry was like certain oriental idols which when opened are found to be filled with exquisite perfumes. "The Stirrup Cup" is one of the simplest of these allegories. It was a

custom in olden days when a man was ready to journey, for one who loved him to bring a glass of wine which he drank in the saddle ; and this was called the stirrup or parting cup. In the cup offered Lanier was a rare cordial, filled with "sweet herbs from all antiquity," and the name of the cordial was Death :

Then, Time, let not a drop be spilt :  
Hand me the cup whene'er thou wilt ;  
'T is thy rich stirrup cup to me ;  
I 'll drink it down right smilingly.

In four stanzas of "Night and Day" he compresses the tragedy of *Othello*, not the tragedy that Shakespeare wrote but the tragedy that was in the Moor's soul when Desdemona was gone. In "Life and Song" he sought to express the ideal of a poet, and the closing lines might well be the measure of his own heroic life :

His song was only living aloud,  
His work a singing with his hand.

In "How Love Looked for Hell" the lesson is hidden deeper ; for the profound yet simple meaning of the poem is that, search high or low, Love can never find hell because he takes heaven with him wherever he goes. Another poem of the same class, but longer and more involved, is "The Symphony." Here Lanier faces one of the greatest problems of the age, the problem of industrialism with its false standards and waste of human happiness, and his answer is the same that Tennyson gave in his later poems ; namely, that the familiar love in human hearts can settle every social question when left to its own unselfish way :

Vainly might Plato's brain revolve it,  
Plainly the heart of a child might solve it.

The longer poems of Lanier are of uneven merit and are all more or less fragmentary. The chief impression from reading the "Psalm of the West," for example, is that it is

the prelude to some greater work that was left unfinished. More finely wrought and more typical of Lanier's mood and **Marsches of Glynn** method is "The Marshes of Glynn," his best-known work. It is a marvelous poem, one of the most haunting in our language; yet it is like certain symphonies in that it says nothing, being all feeling,—vague, inexpressible feeling. Some readers find no meaning or satisfaction in it; others hail it as a perfect interpretation of their own mood or emotion when they stand speechless before the sunrise or the afterglow or a landscape upon which the very spirit of beauty and peace is brooding.

**The Quality of Lanier.** In order to sympathize with Lanier, and so to understand him, it is necessary to keep in mind that he was a musician rather than a poet in our ordinary understanding of the term. In his verse he used words, exactly as he used the tones of his flute, not so much to express ideas as to call up certain emotions that find no voice save in music. As he said, "Music takes up the thread that language drops," which explains that beautiful but puzzling line which closes "The Symphony":

Music is Love in search of a word.

We have spoken of "The Symphony" as an answer to the problem of industrial waste and sorrow, but it contains also **Music and Poetry** Lanier's confession of faith; namely, that social evils arise among men because of their lack of harmony; and that spiritual harmony, the concord of souls which makes strife impossible, may be attained through music. The same belief appears in *Tiger Lilacs* (a novel written by Lanier in his early days), in which a certain character makes these professions:

"To make a *home* out of a household, given the raw materials—to wit, wife, children, a friend or two and a house—two other things are necessary. These are a good fire and good music. And inasmuch as we can do without the fire for half the year, I may say music is the one essential."

"Late explorers say they have found some nations that have no God; but I have not read of any that had no music." "Music means harmony, harmony means love, love means—God!"

One may therefore summarize Lanier by saying that he was a poet who used verbal rhythm, as a musician uses harmonious chords, to play upon our better feelings. His poems of nature give us no definite picture of the external world but are filled with murmurings, tremblings, undertones,—all the vague impressions which one receives when alone in the solitudes, as if the world were alive but inarticulate:

Ye marshes, how candid and simple and nothing-withholding and free  
Ye publish yourselves to the sky and offer yourselves to the sea!  
Tolerant plains, that suffer the sea and the rains and the sun,  
Ye spread and span like the catholic man that hath mightily won  
God out of knowledge and good out of infinite pain  
And sight out of blindness and purity out of a stain.

His poems of life have similar virtues and weaknesses: they are melodious; they are nobly inspired; they appeal to our finest feelings; but they are always vague in that they record no definite thought and speak no downright message.

The criticism may be more clear if we compare Lanier with Whittier, a man equally noble, who speaks a language that all   
*Lanier and Whittier* men understand. The poems of the two supplement each other, one reflecting the reality of life, the other its mysterious dreams. In Whittier's poetry we look upon a landscape and a people, and we say, "I have seen that rugged landscape with my own eyes; I have eaten bread with those people, and have understood and loved them." Then we read Lanier's poetry and say, "Yes, I have had those feelings at times; but I do not speak of them to others because I cannot tell what they mean to me." Both poets are good, and both fail of greatness in poetry, Whittier because he has no exalted imagination, Lanier because he lacks primitive simplicity and strength. One poet sings a song to cheer the day's labor, the other makes a melody to accompany our twilight reveries.

## "WALT" WHITMAN (1819-1892)

Since Whitman insisted upon being called "Walt" instead of Walter, so let it be. The name accords with the free-and-easy style of his verse. If you can find some abridged selections from that verse, read them by all means; but if you

must search the whole of it for the passages that are worth reading, then pass it cheerfully by; for such another vain display of egotism, vulgarity and rant never appeared under the name of poetry. Whitman was so absurdly fond of his "chants" and so ignorant of poetry that he preserved the whole of his work in a final edition, and his publishers still insist upon printing it, rubbish and all. The result is that the few rare verses which stamp him as a poet are apt to be overlooked in the multitudinous gabblings which, of themselves, might mark him as a mere freak or "sensation" in our modest literature.



WALT WHITMAN

looked in the multitudinous gabblings which, of themselves, might mark him as a mere freak or "sensation" in our modest literature.

**Biographical Sketch.** Ordinarily when we read poetry we desire to know something of the man who wrote it, of his youth, his training, the circumstance of his work and the personal ideals which made him view life steadily in one light rather than in another. In

dealing with Whitman it is advisable to leave such natural curiosity unsatisfied, and for two reasons: first, the man was far from admirable or upright, and to meet him at certain stages is to lose all desire to read his poetry; and second, he was so extremely secretive about himself, while professing boundless good-fellowship with all men, that we can seldom trust his own record, much less that of his admirers. There are great blanks in the story of his life; his real biography has not yet been written; and in the jungle of controversial writings which has grown up around him one loses sight of Whitman in a maze of extravagant or contradictory opinions.<sup>1</sup>

Let it suffice then to record, in catalogue fashion, that Whitman was born (1819) on Long Island, of stubborn farmer stock; that he spent his earliest years by the sea, which inspired his best verse; that he grew up in the streets of Brooklyn and was always fascinated by the restless tide of city life, as reflected in such poems as "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"; that his education was scanty and of the "picked up" variety; that to the end of his life, though ignorant of what literary men regard as the *a-b-c* of knowledge, he was supremely well satisfied with himself; that till he was past forty he worked irregularly at odd jobs, but was by choice a loafer; that he was a man of superb physical health and gloried in his body, without much regard for moral standards; that his strength was broken by nursing wounded soldiers during the war, a beautiful and unselfish service; that he was then a government clerk in Washington until partly disabled by a paralytic stroke, and that the remainder of his life was spent at Camden, New Jersey. His *Leaves of Grass* (published first in 1855, and republished with additions many times) brought him very little return in money, and his last years were spent in a state of semipoverty, relieved by the gifts of a small circle of admirers.

**Whitman's Verse.** In a single book, *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman has collected all his verse. This book would be a chaos even had he left his works in the order in which they were written; but that is precisely what he did not do. Instead, he enlarged and rearranged the work ten different times, mixing up his worst and his best verses, so that it is now

<sup>1</sup> Of the many biographies of Whitman perhaps the best for beginners is Perry's *Walt Whitman* (1906), in American Men of Letters Series.

very difficult to trace his development as a poet. We may, however, tentatively arrange his work in three divisions: his early shouting to attract attention (as summarized in the line "I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world"), his war poems, and his later verse written after he had learned something of the discipline of life and poetry.

The quality of his early work may be judged from a few disjointed lines of his characteristic "Song of Myself":

Has any one supposed it lucky to be born?

I hasten to inform him or her that it is just as lucky to die, and I know it.

I pass death with the dying and birth with the new-wash'd babe, and am  
not contain'd between my hat and boots,  
And peruse manifold objects, no two alike, and every one good,  
The earth good and the stars good, and their adjuncts all good.

The big doors of the country barn stand open and ready,  
The dried grass of the harvest-time loads the slow-drawn wagon.  
The clear light plays on the brown, gray and green intertinged,  
The armfuls are pack'd to the sagging mow.

I am there, I help, I came stretch'd atop of the load,  
I felt its soft jolts, one leg reclined on the other,  
I jump from the cross-beams and seize the clover and timothy,  
And roll head over heels and tangle my hair full of wisps.

The boatmen and clam-diggers arose early and stopt for me.  
I tuck'd my trowser ends in my boots and went and had a good time:  
You should have been with us that day round the chowder-kettle.

Thus he rambles on, gabbing of every place or occupation or newspaper report that comes into his head. When he ends this grotesque "Song of Myself" after a thousand lines or more, he makes another just like it. We read a few words here and there, amazed that any publisher should print such rubbish; and then, when we are weary of Whitman's conceit or bad taste, comes a flash of insight, of imagination, of poetry:

Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,  
Healthy, free, the world before me,  
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.

These yearnings why are they? these thoughts in the darkness why are they?

Why are there men and women that while they are nigh me the sunlight expands my blood?

Why when they leave me do my pennants of joy sink flat and lank?

Why are there trees I never walk under but large and melodious thoughts descend upon me?

There are, in short, hundreds of pages of such "chanting" with its grain of wheat hid in a bushel of chaff. We refer to it here not because it is worth reading but to record the curious fact that many European critics hail it as typical American poetry, even while we wonder why anybody should regard it as either American or poetic.

The explanation is simple. Europeans have not yet rid themselves of the idea that America is the strange, wild land of Cooper's *Pioneers*, and that any poetry produced here must naturally be uncouth, misshapen, defiant of all poetic laws or traditions. To such critics Whitman's crudity seems typical of a country where one is in nightly danger of losing his scalp, where arguments are settled by revolvers, and where a hungry man needs only to shoot a buffalo or a bear from his back door. Meanwhile America, the country that planted colleges and churches in a wilderness, that loves liberty because she honors law, that never saw a knight in armor but that has, even in her plainsmen and lumberjacks, a chivalry for woman that would adorn a Bayard, — that real America ignores the bulk of Whitman's work simply because she knows that, of all her poets, he is the least representative of her culture, her ideals, her heroic and aspiring life.

The second division of Whitman's work is made up chiefly of verses written in war time, to some of which he gave the significant title, *Drum Taps*. In such poems as "Beat, Beat, Drums," "Cavalry Crossing a Ford" and "By the Bivouac's Fitful Flame" he reflected the emotional excitement of '61 and the stern days that followed.

Note, for example, the startling vigor of "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors," which depicts an old negro woman by the roadside, looking with wonder on the free flag which she sees for the first time aloft over marching men :

Who are you, dusky woman, so ancient, hardly human,  
With your woolly-white and turban'd head and bare bony feet?  
Why, rising by the roadside here, do you the colors greet?

Another side of the war is reflected in such poems as "Come up from the Fields, Father," an exquisite picture of an old mother and father receiving the news of their son's death on the battlefield. In the same class belong two fine tributes, "O Captain, My Captain" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed," written in moments of noble emotion when the news came that Lincoln was dead. The former tribute, with its rhythmic swing and lyric refrain, indicates what Whitman might have done in poetry had he been a more patient workman. So also does "Pioneers," a lyric that is wholly American and Western and exultant :

Have the elder races halted?  
Do they droop and end their lesson, wearied over there beyond the seas?  
We take up the task eternal, and the burden and the lesson,  
Pioneers! O Pioneers!

In the third class of Whitman's works are the poems written late in life, when he had learned to suppress his **Later Poems** blatant egotism and to pay some little attention to poetic form and melody. Though his lines are still crude and irregular, many of them move to a powerful rhythm, such as the impressive "With Husky-Haughty Lips, O Sea," which suggests the surge and beat of breakers on the shore. In others he gives finely imaginative expression to an ideal or a yearning, and his verse rises to high poetic levels. Note this allegory of the spider, an insect that, when adrift or in a strange place, sends out delicate filaments on the air currents until one thread takes hold of some solid substance and is used as a bridge over the unknown :

A noiseless patient spider,  
 I'mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,  
 Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding  
 It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament out of itself,  
 Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you, O my soul, where you stand,  
 Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,  
 Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to  
 connect them,  
 Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,  
 Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.



WHITMAN'S BIRTHPLACE, WEST HILLS, LONG ISLAND

Among the best of Whitman's works are his poems to death. "Joy, Shipmate, Joy," "Death's Valley," "Darest Thou Now, O Soul," "Last Invocation," "Good-Bye, My Fancy," — in such haunting lyrics he reflects the natural view of death, not as a terrible or tragic or final event but as a confident going forth to meet new experiences. Other notable poems that well repay the reading are "The Mystic Trumpeter," "The Man-of-War Bird," "The Ox Tamer," "Thanks in Old Age" and "Aboard at a Ship's Helm."

In naming the above works our purpose is simply to lure the reader away from the insufferable Whitmanesque "chant"

and to attract attention to a few poems that sound a new note in literature, a note of freedom, of joy, of superb confidence, which warms the heart when we hear it. When these poems are known others will suggest themselves: "Rise, O Days, from Your Fathomless Deeps," "I Hear America Singing," "There was a Boy Went Forth," "The Road Unknown," "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking." There is magic in such names; but unfortunately in most cases the reader will find only an alluring title and a few scattered lines of poetry; the rest is Whitman.

The author of the "Song of Myself" proclaimed himself the poet of democracy and wrote many verses on his alleged Democracy subject; but those who read them will soon tire of one whose idea of democracy was that any man is as good, as wise, as godlike as any other. Perhaps his best work in this field is "Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood," a patriotic poem read at "Commencement" time in Dartmouth College (1872). There is too much of vainglorious boasting in the poem (for America should be modest, and can afford to be modest), but it has enough of prophetic vision and exalted imagination to make us overlook its unworthy spread-eagleism.

As a farewell to Whitman one should read what is perhaps his noblest single work, "The Prayer of Columbus." The Prayer of Columbus poem is supposed to reflect the thought of Columbus when, as a worn-out voyager, an old man on his last expedition, he looked out over his wrecked ships to the lonely sea beyond; but the reader may see in it another picture, that of a broken old man in his solitary house at Camden, writing with a trembling hand the lines which reflect his unshaken confidence:

My terminus near,  
The clouds already closing in upon me,  
The voyage balk'd, the course disputed, lost,  
I yield my ships to Thee.

My hands, my limbs grow nerveless,  
My brain feels rack'd, bewilder'd ;  
Let the old timbers part, I will not part,  
I will cling fast to Thee, O God, though the waves buffet me,  
Thee, Thee at least I know.

Is it the prophet's thought I speak, or am I raving ?  
What do I know of life ? what of myself ?  
I know not even my own work past or present ;  
Dim ever-shifting guesses of it spread before me,  
Of newer better worlds, their mighty parturition,  
Mocking, perplexing me.

And these things I see suddenly, what mean they ?  
As if some miracle, some hand divine, unseal'd my eyes,  
Shadowy vast shapes smile through the air and sky,  
And on the distant waves sail countless ships,  
And anthems in new tongues I hear saluting me.

## THE PROSE WRITERS

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON (1803-1882)

Emerson is the mountaineer of our literature ; to read him is to have the impression of being on the heights. It is solitary there, far removed from ordinary affairs ; but the air is keen, the outlook grand, the heavens near. Our companions are the familiar earth by day or the mysterious stars by night, and these are good if only to recall the silent splendor of God's universe amid the pother of human inventions. There also the very spirit of liberty, which seems to have its dwelling among the hills, enters into us and makes us sympathize with Emerson's message of individual freedom.

It is still a question whether Emerson should be classed with the poets or prose writers, and our only reason for placing him with the latter is that his "Nature" seems more typical than his "Wood Notes," though in truth both works convey precisely the same message. He was a great man

who used prose or verse as suited his mood at the moment; but he was never a great poet, and only on rare occasions was he a great prose writer.

**Life.** Emerson has been called "the wingéd Franklin," "the Yankee Shelley" and other contradictory names which strive to express the union of shrewd sense and lofty idealism that led him

to write "Hitch your wagon to a star" and many another aphorism intended to bring heaven and earth close together. We shall indicate enough of his inheritance if we call him a Puritan of the Puritans, a moralist descended from seven generations of heroic ministers who had helped to make America a free nation, and who had practiced the love of God and man and country before preaching it to their congregations.

The quality of these ancestors entered into Emerson and gave him the granite steadfastness that is one of his marked characteristics. Meeting him in his serene old age one



RALPH WALDO EMERSON

would hardly suspect him of heroism; but to meet him in childhood is to understand the kind of man he was, and must be. If you would appreciate the quality of that childhood, picture to yourself a bare house with an open fire and plenty of books, but little else of comfort. There are a mother and six children in the house, desperately poor: for the father is dead and has left his family nothing and everything,—nothing that makes life rich, everything in the way of ideals and blessed memories to make life wealthy. The mother works as only a poor woman can from morning till night. The children go to school by day; but instead of playing after school-hours they run errands

for the neighbors, drive cows from pasture, shovel snow, pick huckleberries, earn an honest penny. In the evening they read together before the open fire. When they are hungry, as they often are, a Puritan aunt who shares their poverty tells them stories of human endurance. The circle narrows when an older brother goes to college; the rest reduce their meals and spare their pennies in order to help him. After graduation he teaches school and devotes his earnings to giving the next brother his chance. All the while they speak courteously to each other, remember their father's teaching that they are children of God, and view their hard life steadily in the light of that sublime doctrine.

The rest of the story is easily told. Emerson was born in Boston, then a straggling town, in 1803. When his turn came he went to **The College** Harvard, and largely supported himself there by such **Boy** odd jobs as only a poor student knows how to find. Wasted time he called it; for he took little interest in college discipline or college fun and was given to haphazard reading, "sinfully strolling from book to book, from care to idleness," as he said. Later he declared that the only good thing he found in Harvard was a solitary chamber.

After leaving college he taught school and shared his earnings, according to family tradition. Then he began to study for the **The** ministry; or perhaps we should say "read," for **Preacher** Emerson never really studied anything. At twenty-three he was licensed to preach, and three years later was chosen pastor of the Second Church in Boston. It was the famous Old North Church in which the Mathers had preached, and the Puritan divines must have turned in their graves when the young radical began to utter his heresies from the ancient pulpit. He was loved and trusted by his congregation, but presently he differed with them in the matter of the ritual and resigned his ministry.

Next he traveled in Europe, where he found as little of value as he had previously found in college. The old institutions, which roused the romantic enthusiasm of Irving and Longfellow, were to him only relics of barbarism. He went to Europe, he said, to see two men, and he found them in Wordsworth and Carlyle. His friendship with the latter and the letters which passed between "the sage of Chelsea" and "the sage of Concord" (as collected and published by Charles Eliot Norton in his *Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson*) are the most interesting result of his pilgrimage.

On his return he settled in the village of Concord, which was to be his home for the remainder of his long life. He began to lecture, **The Lecturer** and so well was the "Lyceum" established at that time that he was soon known throughout the country. For forty years this lecturing continued, and the strange thing about it is that in all that time he hardly met one audience that understood him or that carried away any definite idea of what he had talked about. Something noble in the man seemed to attract people; as Lowell said, they did not go to hear what Emerson said but to hear Emerson.

Meanwhile he was writing prose and poetry. His literary work began in college and consisted largely in recording such thoughts **The Writer** or quotations as seemed worthy of preservation. In his private *Journal* (now published in several volumes) may be found practically everything he put into the formal works which he sent forth from Concord. These had at first a very small circle of readers; but the circle widened steadily, and the phenomenon is more remarkable in view of the fact that the author avoided publicity and had no ambition for success. He lived contentedly in a country village; he cultivated his garden and his neighbors; he spent long hours alone with nature; he wrote the thoughts that came to him and sent them to make their own way in the world, while he himself remained, as he said, "far from fame behind the birch trees."

The last years of his life were as the twilight of a perfect day. His mental powers failed slowly; he seemed to drift out of the present world into another of pure memories; even his friends became spiritualized, lost the appearance of earth and assumed their eternal semblance. When he stood beside the coffin of Longfellow, looking intently into the poet's face, he was heard to murmur, "A sweet, a gracious personality, but I have forgotten his name." To the inevitable changes (the last came in 1882) he adapted himself with the same serenity which marked his whole life. He even smiled as he read the closing lines of his "Terminus":

As the bird trims her to the gale,  
I trim myself to the storm of time,  
I man the rudder, reef the sail,  
Obey the voice at eve obeyed at prime:  
" Lowly faithful, banish fear,  
Right onward drive unharmed;  
The port, well worth the cruise, is near,  
And every wave is charmed."

**Emerson's Poetry.** There is a ruggedness in Emerson's verse which attracts some readers while it repels others by its unmelodious rhythm. It may help us to measure that verse if we recall the author's criticism thereof. In 1839 he wrote :

" I am naturally keenly susceptible to the pleasures of rhythm, and cannot believe but one day I shall attain to that splendid dialect, so ardent is my wish ; and these wishes, I suppose, are ever only the buds of power ; but up to this hour I have never had a true success in such attempts."

One must be lenient with a poet who confesses that he cannot attain the "splendid dialect," especially so since we are inclined to agree with him. In the following passage from "Each and All" we may discover the reason for his lack of success :

Little thinks, in the field, yon red-cloaked clown  
Of thee from the hill-top looking down ;  
The heifer that lows in the upland farm,  
Far-heard, lows not thine ear to charm ;  
The sexton, tolling his bell at noon,  
Deems not that great Napoleon  
Stops his horse, and lists with delight,  
Whilst his files sweep round yon Alpine height ;  
Nor knowest thou what argument  
Thy life to thy neighbor's creed has lent.  
All are needed by each one ;  
Nothing is fair or good alone.  
I thought the sparrow's note from heaven,  
Singing at dawn on the alder bough ;  
I brought him home in his nest at even ;  
He sings the song, but it cheers not now,  
For I did not bring home the river and sky :  
He sang to my ear ; they sang to my eye.  
The delicate shells lay on the shore ;  
The bubbles of the latest wave  
Fresh pearls to their enamel gave,  
And the bellowing of the savage sea  
Greeted their safe escape to me.  
I wiped away the weeds and foam,  
I fetched my sea-born treasures home ;  
But the poor, unsightly, noisome things  
Had left their beauty on the shore  
With the sun and the sand and the wild uproar.

Our first criticism is that the poem contains both fine and faulty lines, and that the total impression is an excellent one. Next, we note that the verse is labored; for Emerson was not a natural singer, like Whittier, and was hampered by his tendency to think too much instead of giving free expression to his emotion.<sup>1</sup> Finally, he is didactic; that is, he is teaching the lesson that you must not judge a thing by itself, as if it had no history or connections, but must consider it in its environment, as a part of its own world.

As in "Each and All" so in most of his verse Emerson is too much of a teacher or moralist to be a poet. In "The Rhodora," one of his most perfect poems, he proclaims that "Beauty is its own excuse for being"; but straightway he forgets the word and devotes his verse not to beauty but to some ethical lesson. Very rarely does he break away from this unpoetic habit, as when he interrupts the moralizing of his "World Soul" to write a lyric that we welcome for its own sake:

Spring still makes spring in the mind  
When sixty years are told;  
Love wakes anew this throbbing heart,  
And we are never old.  
Over the winter glaciers  
I see the summer glow,  
And through the wide-piled snowdrift  
The warm rosebuds below.

The most readable of Emerson's poems are those in which he reflects his impressions of nature, such as "Seashore," "The Humble-Bee," "The Snow-Storm," "Days," "Fable," "Forbearance," "The Titmouse" and "Wood-Notes." In another class are his philosophical poems devoted to transcendental doctrines. The beginner will do well to skip these, since they are more of a puzzle than a

<sup>1</sup> Most good poems are characterized by both thought and feeling, and by a perfection of form that indicates artistic workmanship. With Emerson the thought is the main thing; feeling or emotion is subordinate or lacking, and he seldom has the patience to work over his thought until it assumes beautiful or perfect expression.

source of pleasure. In a third class are poems of more personal interest, such as the noble "Threnody," a poem of grief written after the death of Emerson's little boy; "Good-Bye," in which the poet bids farewell to fame as he hies him to the country; "To Ellen," which half reveals his love story; "Written in Rome," which speaks of the society he found in solitude; and the "Concord Hymn," written at the dedication of Battle Monument, with its striking opening lines:

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,  
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,  
Here once the embattled farmers stood,  
And fired the shot heard round the world.

**Prose Works.** Perhaps the most typical of Emerson's prose works is his first book, to which he gave the name *Nature* (1836). In this he records not his impressions of bird or beast or flower, as his neighbor Thoreau was doing in *Walden*, but rather his philosophy of the universe. "Nature always wears the colors of the spirit"; "Every animal function, from the sponge up to Hercules, shall hint or thunder to man the laws of right and wrong, and echo the ten commandments"; "The foundations of man are not in matter but in spirit, and the element of spirit is eternity"—scores of such expressions indicate that Emerson deals with the soul of things, not with their outward appearance. Does a flower appeal to him? Its scientific name and classification are of no consequence; like Wordsworth, he would understand what thought of God the flower speaks. To him nature is a mirror in which the Almighty reflects his thought; again it is a parable, a little story written in trees or hills or stars; frequently it is a living presence, speaking melodiously in winds or waters; and always it is an inspiration to learn wisdom at first hand:

"Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, criticisms. The foregoing generations beheld God and Nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight, and not of tradition?"

The last quotation might well be an introduction to Emerson's second work, *The American Scholar* (1837), which was a plea for laying aside European models and fronting life as free men in a new world. Holmes called this work "our intellectual Declaration of Independence," and it was followed by a succession of volumes — *Essays*, *Representative Men*, *Conduct of Life*, *Society and Solitude* and several others — all devoted to the same two doctrines of idealism and individuality.

Among these prose works the reader must make his own selection. All are worth reading; none is easy to read; even **Representative Men** the best of them is better appreciated in brief **stalments**, since few can follow Emerson long without wearying. *English Traits* is a keen but kindly criticism of "our cousins" overseas, which an American can read with more pleasure than an Englishman. *Representative Men* is a series of essays on Plato, Shakespeare, Napoleon and other world figures, which may well be read in connection with Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship*, since the two books reflect the same subject from widely different angles. Carlyle was in theory an aristocrat and a force-worshiper, Emerson a democrat and a believer in ideals. One author would relate us to his heroes in the attitude of slave to master, the other in the relation of brothers and equals.

Of the shorter prose works, collected in various volumes of *Essays*, we shall name only a few in two main groups, which **The Essays** we may call the ideal and the practical. In the first group are such typical works as "The Over-Soul," "Compensation," "Spiritual Laws" and "History"; in the latter are "Heroism," "Self-Reliance," "Literary Ethics" (an address to young collegians), "Character" and "Manners."

It is difficult to criticize such writings, which have a daring originality of thought and a springlike freshness of expression that set them apart from all other essays ancient or modern. They are the most quotable, the fittest to "point a moral or adorn a tale" that have ever appeared in our literature; but

they are also disjointed, oracular, hard to follow; and the explanation is found in the manner of their production. When Emerson projected a new lecture or essay he never thought his subject out or ordered it from beginning to end. That would have been another man's way of doing it. He collected from his notebooks such thoughts as seemed to bear upon his subject, strung them together, and made an end when he had enough. The connection or relation between his thoughts is always frail and often invisible; some compare it with the thread which holds the pearls of a necklace together; others quote with a smile the epigram of Goldwin Smith, who said that he found an Emersonian essay about as coherent as a bag of marbles. And that suggests a fair criticism of all Emerson's prose; namely, that it is a series of expressions excellent in themselves but having so little logical sequence that a paragraph from one essay may be placed at the beginning, middle or end of any other, where it seems to be equally at home.

**The Doctrine of Emerson.** Since we constantly hear of "idealism" in connection with Emerson, let us understand the word if we can; or rather the fact, for idealism is the most significant quality of humanity. The term will be better understood if we place it beside "materialism," which expresses an opposite view of life. The difference may be summarized in the statement that the idealist is a man of spirit, or idea, in that he trusts the evidence of the soul; while the materialist is a man of flesh, or sense, in that he believes only what is evident to the senses. One judges the world by himself; the other judges himself by the world.

To illustrate our meaning: the materialist, looking outward, sees that the world is made up of force-driven matter, of gas, carbon and mineral; and he says, "Even so am I made up." He studies an object, sees that it has its appointed cycle of growth and decay, and concludes, "Even so do I appear and vanish." To him the world is the only reality, and the world perishes, and man is but a part of the world.

The idealist, looking first within, perceives that self-consciousness is the great fact of life, and that consciousness expresses itself in words or deeds; then he looks outward, and is aware of another Consciousness that expresses itself in the lowly grass or in the stars of heaven. Looking inward he finds that he is governed by ideas of truth, beauty, goodness and duty; looking outward he everywhere finds evidence of truth and beauty and moral law in the world. He sees, moreover, that while his body changes constantly his self remains the same yesterday, to-day and forever; and again his discovery is a guide to the outer world, with its seedtime and harvest, which is but the symbol or garment of a Divine Self that abides without shadow of change in a constantly changing universe. To him the only reality is spirit, and spirit cannot be harmed by fire or flood; neither can it die or be buried, for it is immortal and imperishable.

Such, in simple words, was the idealism of Emerson, an idealism that was born in him and that governed him long before he became involved in transcendentalism, with its scraps of borrowed Hindu philosophy. It gave message or meaning to his first work, *Nature*, and to all the subsequent essays or poems in which he pictured the world as a symbol or visible expression of a spiritual reality. In other words, nature was to Emerson the Book of the Lord, and the chief thing of interest was not the book but the idea that was written therein.

Having read the universe and determined its spiritual quality, Emerson turned his eyes on humanity. Presently he announced that a man's chief glory is his individuality; that he is a free being, different from every other; that his business is to obey his individual genius; that he should, therefore, ignore the Past with its traditions, and learn directly "from the Divine Soul which inspires all men." Having announced that doctrine, he spent the rest of his life in illustrating or enlarging it; and the sum of his teaching was, "Do not follow

The Individualist

me or any other master ; follow your own spirit. Never mind what history says, or philosophy or tradition or the saints and sages. The same inspiration which led the prophets is yours for the taking, and you have your work to do as they had theirs. Revere your own soul ; trust your intuition ; and whatever you find in your heart to do, do it without doubt or fear, though all the world thunder in your ears that you must do otherwise. As for the voice of authority, 'Let not a man quit his belief that a popgun is a popgun, though the anointed and honorable of the earth affirm it to be the crack of doom.'"

Such was Emerson's pet doctrine of individualism. It appeared with startling vigor in *The American Scholar* at a time when our writers were prone to imitate English poetry, German sentimentality or some other imported product. It came also

with good grace from one whose life was noble, but it had a weak or dangerous or grotesque side that Emerson overlooked. Thus, every crank or fanatic or rainbow-chaser is also an individualist, and most of them believe as strongly as Emerson in the Over-Soul. The only difference is that they do not have his sense or integrity or humor to balance their individualism. While Emerson exalted individual liberty he seemed to forget that America is a country devoted to "liberty under law," and that at every period of her history she has had need to emphasize the law rather than the liberty. Moreover, individualism is a quality that takes care of itself, being finest in one who is least conscious of his own importance ;



EMERSON'S HOME, CONCORD

and to study any strongly individual character, a Washington or a Lincoln for example, is to discover that he strove to be true to his race and traditions as well as to himself. Hence Emerson's doctrine, to live in the Present and have entire confidence in yourself, needs to be supplemented by another : to revere the Past with its immortal heroes, who by their labor and triumph have established some truths that no sane man will ever question.

There are other interesting qualities of Emerson, his splendid optimism, for instance, which came partly from his spiritual

**A New  
World  
Writer** view of the universe and partly from his association with nature; for the writer who is in daily contact with sunshine or rain and who trusts his soul's ideals of truth and beauty has no place for pessimism or despair ; even in moments of darkness he looks upward and reads his lesson :

Teach me your mood, O patient stars,  
Who climb each night the ancient sky,  
Leaving on space no shade, no scars,  
No trace of age, no fear to die !

Though he was and still is called a visionary, there is a practical quality in his writing which is better than anything you will find in *Poor Richard's Almanac*. Thus the burden of Franklin's teaching was the value of time, a lesson which the sage of Concord illuminates as with celestial light in his poem "Days," and to which he brings earth's candle in his prose essay "Work and Days."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the more one reads Emerson the more is one convinced that he is our typical New World writer, a rare genius who combines the best qualities of Franklin and Edwards, having the practical sense of the one and the spiritual insight of the other.<sup>2</sup> With his idealism

<sup>1</sup> The two works should be read in connection as an interesting example of Emerson's use of prose and verse to reflect the same idea. Holmes selects the same two works to illustrate the essential difference between prose and poetry. See Holmes, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> In 1830 Channing published an essay, "National Literature," in which he said that Benjamin Franklin and Jonathan Edwards were the only writers up to that time who had worthily presented the American mind, with its practical and ideal sides, to foreign readers.

and individuality, his imagination that soars to heaven but is equally at home on solid earth, his sound judgment to balance his mysticism, his forceful style that runs from epigram to sustained eloquence, his straight-fibered manhood in which criticism finds nothing to pardon or regret, — with all these sterling qualities he is one of the most representative writers that America has ever produced.

### NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE (1804-1864)

Some great writers belong to humanity, others to their own land or people. Hawthorne is in the latter class apparently, for ever since Lowell rashly characterized him as "the greatest imaginative genius since Shakespeare" our critics commonly speak of him in superlatives. Meanwhile most European critics (who acclaim such unequal writers as Cooper and Poe, Whitman and Mark Twain) either leave Hawthorne unread or else wonder what Americans find in him to stir their enthusiasm.

The explanation is that Hawthorne's field was so intensely local that only those who are familiar with it can appreciate him. Almost any reader can enjoy Cooper, since he deals with adventurous men whom everybody understands; but Hawthorne deals with the New England Puritan of the seventeenth century, a very peculiar hero, and to enjoy the novelist one must have some personal or historic interest in his subject. Moreover, he alienates many readers by presenting only the darker side of Puritanism. He is a man who never laughs and seldom smiles in his work; he passes over a hundred normal and therefore cheerful homes to pitch upon some gloomy habitation of sin or remorse, and makes that the burden of his tale. In no other romancer do we find genius of such high order at work in so barren a field.

**Life.** There is an air of reserve about Hawthorne which no biography has ever penetrated. A schoolmate who met him daily once said, "I love Hawthorne; I admire him; but I do not know him. He lives in a mysterious world of thought and imagination which he

never permits me to enter." That characterization applies as well to-day as when it was first spoken, almost a century ago. To his family and to a very few friends Hawthorne was evidently a genial man;<sup>1</sup> but from the world and its affairs he always held aloof, wrapped in his mantle of mystery.

A study of his childhood may help us to understand the somber quality of all his work. He was descended from the Puritans who

came to Boston with John Winthrop, and was born in the seaport of Salem, Massachusetts, in 1804. He was only four years old when his father, a sea captain, died in a foreign port; whereupon the mother draped herself in weeds, retired from the sight of neighbors, and for the next forty years made life as funeral as possible. Besides the little boy there were two sisters in the family, and the elder took her meals in her own room, as did the mother. The others went about the darkened house on tiptoe, or peeped out at the world through closed shutters.

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

The shadow of that unnatural home was upon Hawthorne to the end of his life; it accounts in part for his shyness, his fear of society, his lack of interest in his own age or nation.

At seventeen Hawthorne went to Bowdoin College, where Longfellow was his classmate and Franklin Pierce (later President of the United States) one of his friends. His college life seems to have been happy, even gay at times; but when he graduated (1825) and his classmates scattered to find work in the world he returned to his Salem home and secluded himself as if he

<sup>1</sup> Intimate but hardly trustworthy pictures of Hawthorne and his family are presented by his son, Julian Hawthorne, in *Nathaniel Hawthorne and his Wife*. A dozen other memoirs have appeared; but Hawthorne did not want his biography written, and there are many unanswered questions in the story of his life.

had no interest in humanity. It was doubtful, he said afterwards, whether a dozen people knew of his existence in as many years.

All the while he was writing, gathering material for his romances or patiently cultivating his fine style. For days he would brood over a subject; then he would compose a story or parable for the magazines. The stamp of originality was on all these works, but they were seldom accepted. When they returned to him, having found no appreciative editor, he was apt to burn them and complain that he was neglected. Studying the man as he reveals himself at this time in his *Note-Books* (published in a garbled edition by the Hawthorne family), one has the impression that he was a shy, sensitive genius, almost morbidly afraid of the world. From a distance he sent out his stories as "feelers"; when these were ignored he shrank into himself more deeply than before.

Love brought him out of his retreat, as it has accomplished many another miracle. When he became engaged his immediate thought was to find work, and one of his friends secured a position for him in the Boston custom-house, where he weighed coal until he was replaced by a party spoilsman.<sup>1</sup> There were no civil-service rules in those days. Hoping to secure a home, he invested his savings in Brook Farm, worked there for a time with the reformers, detested them, lost his money and gained the experience which he used later in his *Blithedale Romance*. Then he married, and lived in poverty and great happiness for four years in the "Old Manse" at Concord. Another friend obtained for him political appointment as surveyor of the Salem



OLD CUSTOMHOUSE, BOSTON

Where Hawthorne worked

<sup>1</sup> Hawthorne profited three times by the spoils system. When his Boston experience was repeated at Salem he took his revenge in the opening chapter of *The Scarlet Letter*, which ridicules those who received political jobs from the other party.

customhouse; again he was replaced by a spoilsman, and again he complained bitterly. The loss proved a blessing, however, since it gave him leisure to write *The Scarlet Letter*, a novel which immediately placed Hawthorne in the front rank of American writers.

He was now before an appreciative world, and in the flush of fine feeling that followed his triumph he wrote *The House of the Farewell Seven Gables*, *A Wonder Book* and *The Snow Image*. **Greatness** Literature was calling him most hopefully when, at the very prime of life, he turned his back on fortune. His friend Pierce had been nominated by the Democrats (1852), and he was asked to write the candidate's biography for campaign purposes. It was hardly a worthy task, but he accepted it and did it well. When Pierce was elected he "persuaded" Hawthorne to accept the office of consul at Liverpool. The emoluments, some seven thousand dollars a year, seemed enormous to one who had lived straitly, and in the four years of Pierce's administration our novelist saved a sum which, with the income from his books, placed him above the fear of want. Then he went for a long vacation to Italy, where he collected the material for his *Marble Faun*. But he wrote nothing more of consequence.

The remainder of his life was passed in a pleasant kind of hermitage in Emerson's village of Concord. His habits of solitude and **The Unfinished Story** idleness ("cursed habits," he called them) were again upon him; though he began several romances—*Dr. Grimshawe's Secret*, *Septimus Felton*, *The Ancestral Footstep* and *The Dol-liver Romance*—he never made an end of them. In his work he was prone to use some symbol of human ambition, and the symbol of his own later years might well have been the unfinished manuscript which lay upon the coffin when his body was laid under the pines in the old Concord burying ground (1864). His friend Longfellow has described the scene in his beautiful poem "Hawthorne."

**Short Stories and Sketches.** Many young people become familiar with Hawthorne as a teller of bedtime stories long before they meet him in the rôle of famous novelist. In his earlier days he wrote *Grandfather's Chair* (modeled on a similar work by Scott), dealing with Colonial legends, and broadened his field in *Biographical Stories for Children*. Other and better works belonging to the same juvenile class are *A Wonder Book* (1851) and *Tanglewood Tales* (1853),

which are modern versions of the classic myths and stories that Greek mothers used to tell their children long ago.

The best of Hawthorne's original stories are collected in *Twice-Told Tales*, *Mosses from an Old Manse* and *The Pictures of the Past* *Snow Image and Other Twice-Told Tales*. As the bulk of this work is rather depressing we select a few typical tales, arranging them in three groups. In the first are certain sketches, as Hawthorne called them, which aim not to tell a story but to give an impression of the past. "The Old Manse" (in *Mosses from an Old Manse*) is an excellent introduction to this group. Others in which the author comes out from the gloom to give his humor a glimpse of pale sunshine are "A Rill from the Town Pump," "Main Street," "Little Annie's Ramble," "Sights from a Steeple" and, as suggestive of Hawthorne's solitary outings, "Footprints on the Seashore."

In the second group are numerous allegories and symbolical stories. To understand Hawthorne's method of allegory<sup>1</sup> read

**Allegories** "The Snow Image," which is the story of a snowy figure that became warm, living and companionable to some children until it was spoiled by a hard-headed person, without imagination or real sense, who forgot that he was ever a child himself or that there is such a beautiful and precious thing as a child-view of the universe.

In his constant symbolism (that is, in his use of an outward sign or token to represent an idea) Hawthorne reflected a trait that is common to humanity in all ages. Thus, every nation has its concrete symbol, its flag or eagle or lion; a great religion is represented by a cross or a crescent; in art and poetry

<sup>1</sup> An allegory is a figure of speech (in rhetoric) or a story (in literature) in which an external object is described in such a way that we apply the description to our own inner experience. Many proverbs, such as "People who live in glass houses should not throw stones," are condensed allegories. So also are fables and parables, such as the fable of the fox and the grapes, or the parable of the lost sheep. Bunyan's famous allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, describes a journey from one city to another, but in reading it we are supposed to think of a Christian's experience in passing through this world to the next.

the sword stands for war and the dove for peace ; an individual has his horseshoe or rabbit's foot or "mascot" as the simple expression of an idea that may be too complex for words. Among primitive people such symbols were associated with charms, magic, baleful or benignant influences ; and Hawthorne accepted this superstitious idea in many of his works, though he was apt to hint, as in "*Lady Eleanor's Mantle*," that the magic of his symbol might have a practical explanation. In this story the lady's gorgeous mantle is a symbol of pride ; its blighting influence *may* be due to the fact that,—but to tell the secret is to spoil the story, and that is not fair to Hawthorne or the reader.

Some of these symbolic tales are too vague or shadowy to be convincing ; in others the author makes artistic use of some simple object, such as a flower or an ornament, to suggest the mystery that broods over every life. **The Black Veil** In "*The Minister's Black Veil*," for example, a clergyman startles his congregation by appearing with a dark veil over his face. The veil itself is a familiar object ; on a woman or a bonnet it would pass unnoticed ; but on the minister it becomes a portentous thing, at once fascinating and repellent. Yesterday they knew the man as a familiar friend ; to-day he is a stranger, and they fear him with a vague, nameless fear. Forty years he wears the mysterious thing, dies and is buried with it, and in all that time they never have a glimpse of his face. Though there is a deal of nonsense in the story, and a hocus-pocus instead of a mystery, we must remember that veil as a striking symbol of the loneliness of life, of the gulf that separates a human soul from every other.

Another and better symbolic tale is "*The Great Stone Face*," which appeals strongly to younger readers, especially to those who have lived much out of doors and who cherish the memory of some natural object, some noble tree or mossy cliff or singing brook, that is forever associated with their thoughts of childhood. To others the tale will have added

interest in that it is supposed to portray the character of Emerson as Hawthorne knew him.

In the third group are numerous stories dealing with Colonial history, and of these "The Gray Champion" and *Legendary Tales* "The Gentle Boy" are fairly typical. Hawthorne has been highly praised in connection with these tales as "the artist who created the Puritan in literature." Most readers will gladly recognize the "artist," since every tale has its line or passage of beauty; but some will murmur at the "creation." The trouble with Hawthorne was that in creating his Puritan he took scant heed of the man whom the Almighty created. He was not a scholar or even a reader; his custom was to brood over an incident of the past (often a grotesque incident, such as he found in Winthrop's old *Journal*), and from his brooding he produced an imaginary character, some heartless fanatic or dismal wretch who had nothing of the Puritan except the label. Of the real Puritan, who knew the joy and courtesy as well as the stern discipline of life, our novelist had only the haziest notion. In consequence his "Gentle Boy" and parts also of his *Scarlet Letter* leave an unwarranted stain on the memory of his ancestors.<sup>1</sup>

**The Four Romances.** The romances of Hawthorne are all studies of the effects of sin on human development. If but one of these romances is to be read, let it be *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), which is a pleasanter story than Hawthorne commonly tells, and which portrays one character that he knew by experience rather than by imagination. Many of

<sup>1</sup> Occasionally, as in "The Gray Champion" and "Endicott and the Red Cross," Hawthorne paints the stern courage of the Puritan, but never his gentle or humane qualities. His typical tale presents the Puritan in the most unlovely guise. In "The Maypole of Merrymount," for example, Morton and his men are represented as inoffensive, art-loving people who were terrorized by the "dismal wretches" of a near-by colony of Puritans. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Morton's crew were a lawless set and a scandal to New England; but they were tolerated until they put all the settlements in danger by debauching the Indians and selling them rum, muskets and gunpowder. The "dismal wretches" were the Pilgrims of Plymouth,—gentle, heroic men, lovers of learning and liberty, who profoundly influenced the whole subsequent history of America.

Hawthorne's stories run to a text, and the text here is, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." The characters are represented as "under a curse";<sup>1</sup> that is, they are bearing the burden and sorrow of some old iniquity committed before they were born; but the affliction is banished in a satisfactory way without leaving us in the haze of mystery that envelops so much of Hawthorne's work. His humor is also in evidence, his interest in life overcomes for a



"THE HOUSE OF SEVEN GABLES," SALEM (BUILT IN 1669)

time his absorption in shadowy symbols, and his whole story is brightened by his evident love of Phœbe Pyncheon, the most natural and winsome of all his characters.

The other romances deal with the same general theme, the blighting effect of sin, but vary greatly in their scenes and characters. *The Marble Faun* (published in England as *Transformation*, 1860) is the most popular, possibly because its scene is laid in Rome, a city to which all travelers go, or aspire to go, before they die; but though it moves in "an atmosphere of art," among the studios of "the eternal city," it is the least

<sup>1</sup> This is a reflection of a family tradition. An ancestor of Hawthorne was judge at the Salem witch trials, in 1692. One of the poor creatures condemned to death is said to have left a curse on the judge's family. In his *Note-Books* Hawthorne makes mention of the traditional curse, and analyzes its possible effect on his own character.

artistic of all the author's works.<sup>1</sup> In *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) Hawthorne deals with the present rather than the past and apparently makes use of his observation, since his scenes and characters are strongly suggestive of the Brook Farm community of reformers, among whom he spent one critical and unhappy year. *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) is not only the most original and powerful of the romances but is commonly ranked by our critics at the head of American fiction. The scene is laid in Boston, in the old Puritan days; the main characters are vividly drawn, and the plot moves to its gloomy but impressive climax as if Wyrd or Fate were at the bottom of it.

**Characteristics of Hawthorne.** Almost the first thing we notice in Hawthorne is his style, a smooth, leisurely, "classic" style which moves along, like a meadow brook, without hurry or exertion. Gradually as we read we become conscious of the novelist's characters, whom he introduces with a veil of mystery around them. They are interesting, as dreams and other mysterious things always are, but they are seldom real or natural or lifelike. At times we seem to be watching a pantomime of shadows, rather than a drama of living men and women.

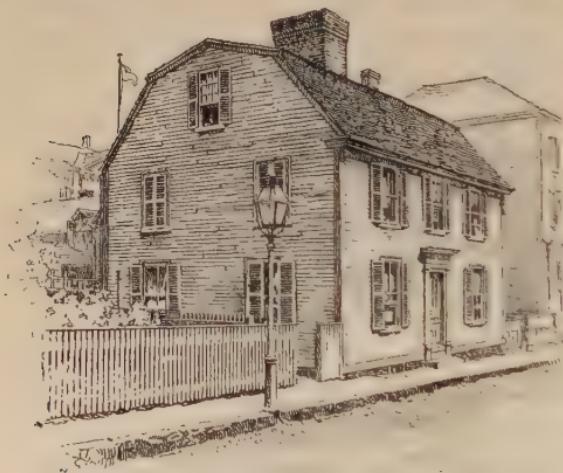
The explanation of these shadowy characters is found in Hawthorne's method of work, as revealed by the *Note-Books* in which he stored his material. Here is a typical record, which was occasioned, no doubt, by the author's meeting with some old nurse, whom he straightway changed from her real semblance to a walking allegory:

"Change from a gay young girl to an old woman. Melancholy events, the effects of which have clustered around her character. . . . Becomes a lover of sick chambers, taking pleasure in receiving dying breaths and laying out the dead. Having her mind full of funeral reminiscences, and possessing more acquaintances beneath the turf than above it."

<sup>1</sup> *The Marble Faun* ends in a fog, as if the author did not know what to do with his characters. It has the amateurish fault of halting the narrative to talk with the reader; and it moralizes to such an extent that the heroine (who is pictured as of almost angelic virtue) eventually becomes a prig and a preacher,—two things that a woman must never be. Nevertheless, the romance has a host of enthusiastic readers, and to criticize it adversely is to bring a storm about one's ears.

This is enough of a story in itself; we need not read "Edward Fane's Rosebud" to see how Hawthorne filled in the details. The strange thing is that he never studied or questioned the poor woman to discover whether she was anything like what he imagined her to be. On another page we read:

"A snake taken into a man's stomach and nourished there from fifteen to thirty-five years, tormenting him most horribly." [Then follows the inevitable moral:] "Type of envy or some other evil passion."



HAWTHORNE'S BIRTHPLACE, SALEM,  
MASSACHUSETTS

There are many such story-records in the *Note-Books*, but among them you will find no indication that the story-teller ever examined the facts with a purpose to discover whether a snake could survive thirty-five years, or minutes, in the acids

of a human stomach, or how long a Puritan church would tolerate a minister who went about with a veil on his face, or whether any other of his symbols had any vital connection with human experience. In a word, Hawthorne was prone to make life conform to his imagination, instead of making his imagination conform to life. Living as he did in the twilight, between the day and the night, he seems to have missed the chief lesson of each, the urge of the one and the repose of the other; and especially did he miss the great fact of cheerfulness. The deathless courage of man, his invincible hope that springs to life under the most adverse circumstances, like

the cyclamen abloom under the snows of winter, — this primal and blessed fact seems to have escaped his notice. At times he hints at it, but he never gives it its true place at the beginning, middle and end of human life.

Thus far our analysis has been largely negative, and Hawthorne was a very positive character. He had the feeling of **Artist and Moralist** an artist for beauty ; and he was one of the few romancers who combine a strong sense of art with a puritanic devotion to conscience and the moral law. Hence his stories all aim to be both artistic and ethical, to satisfy our sense of beauty and our sense of right. In his constant moralizing he was like George Eliot ; or rather, to give the figure its proper sequence, George Eliot was so exclusively a moralist after the Hawthornesque manner that one suspects she must have been familiar with his work when she began to write. Both novelists worked on the assumption that the moral law is the basis of human life and that every sin brings its inevitable retribution. The chief difference was that Hawthorne started with a moral principle and invented characters to match it, while George Eliot started with a human character in whose experience she revealed the unfolding of a moral principle.

The individuality of Hawthorne becomes apparent when we attempt to classify him, — a vain attempt, since there is no **A Solitary Genius** other like him in literature. In dealing with almost any other novelist we can name his models, or at least point out the story-tellers whose methods influenced his work ; but Hawthorne seems to have had no predecessor. Subject, style and method were all his own, developed during his long seclusion at Salem, and from them he never varied. From his *Twice-Told Tales* to his unfinished *Dolliver Romance* he held steadily to the purpose of portraying the moral law against a background of Puritan history.

Such a field would have seemed very narrow to other American writers, who then, as now, were busy with things too many or things too new ; but to Hawthorne it was a world in itself,

a world that lured him as the Indies lured Columbus. In imagination he dwelt in that somber Puritan world, eating at its long-vanished tables or warming himself at its burnt-out fires, until the impulse came to reproduce it in literature. And he did reproduce it, powerfully, single-heartedly, as only genius could have done it. That his portrayal was inaccurate is perhaps a minor consideration; for one writer must depict life as

he meets it on the street or in books, while another is confined to what Ezekiel calls "the chambers of imagery." Hawthorne's liberties with the facts may be pardoned on the ground that he was not an historian but an artist. The historian tells what life has accomplished, the artist what life means.



HENRY TIMROD

#### SECONDARY WRITERS OF PROSE OR VERSE

**The Poets.** Among the fifty or more poets of the period of conflict Henry Timrod, Paul

Hamilton Hayne and Abram J. Ryan are notable for this reason, that their fame, once local, seems to widen with the years. They are commonly grouped as southern poets because of the war lyrics in which they voiced the passionate devotion of the South to its leaders; but what makes them now interesting to a larger circle of readers are their poems of an entirely different kind,—poems that reflect in a tender and beautiful way the common emotions of men in all places and in all ages. Two other prominent singers of the southern school are Theodore O'Hara and James Ryder Randall.

In another group are such varied singers as Richard Henry Stoddard, George H. Boker, Henry Howard Brownell, Thomas B. Read, John G. Saxe, J. G. Holland and Bayard Taylor. These were all famous poets in their own day, and some of them were prolific writers, Holland and Taylor especially. The latter produced thirty volumes of poems, essays, novels and sketches of travel; but, with the exception of his fine translation of Goethe's *Faust* and a few of his original lyrics, the works which he sent forth so abundantly are now neglected. He is typical of a hundred writers who answer the appeal of to-day and win its applause, and who are forgotten when to-morrow comes with its new interests and its new favorites.

**Fiction Writers.** Comparatively few novels were written during this period, perhaps because the terrible shadow of war was over the country and readers were in no mood for fiction. The most popular romance of the age, and one of the most widely read books that America has ever produced, was *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which has been translated and dramatized into so many tongues that it is known all over the earth. The author, Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896), wrote several other stories, all characterized by humor, kindness and intense moral earnestness. Some of these, such as *Oldtown Folks*, *The Minister's Wooing*, *The Pearl of Orr's Island* and *Oldtown Fireside Stories* have decidedly more literary charm than her famous story of slavery.



PAUL HAMILTON HAYNE

The mid-century produced some very good sea stories, and in these we see the influence of Cooper, who was the first to use the ocean successfully as a scene of romantic interest. Dana's *Two Years before the Mast* (1840) was immensely popular when our fathers were boys. It contained, moreover, such realistic pictures of sailor life that it was studied by aspirants for the British and American navies

in the days when the flag rippled proudly over the beautiful old sailing ships. This excellent book is largely a record of personal experience; but in the tales of Herman Melville (1819-1891) we have the added elements of imagination and adventure. *Typee*, *White Jacket*, *Moby Dick*,—these are capital tales of the deep, the last-named especially.

*Typee* (a story well known to Stevenson, evidently) is remarkable for its graphic pictures of sailor life afloat and ashore in the Marquesas Islands, a new field in those days. The narrative is continued in *White Jacket*, which tells

of the return from the South Pacific aboard a man-of-war. In *Moby Dick* we have the real experience of a sailorman and whaler (Melville himself) and the fictitious wanderings of a stout captain, a primeval kind of person, who is at times an interesting lunatic and again a ranting philosopher. In the latter we have an echo of Carlyle, who was making a stir in America in 1850, and who affected Melville so strongly that the latter soon lost his bluff, hearty, sailor fashion of writing, which everybody liked, and assumed a crotchety style that nobody cared to read.

Tales of  
the Sea



HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

A few other novels of the period are interesting as showing the sudden change from romance to realism, a change for which the war was partly responsible, and which will be examined more closely in the following chapter. John Esten Cooke (1830-1886) may serve as a concrete example of the two types of fiction. In his earlier romances, notably in *Leather Stocking and Silk* and *The Virginia Comedians* (1854), he aimed to do for the Cavalier society of the South what Hawthorne was doing for the old Puritan régime in New England; but his later stories, such as *Surrey of Eagle's Nest*, are chiefly notable for their realistic pictures of the great war.

The change from romance to realism is more openly apparent in Theodore Winthrop and Edward Eggleston, whose novels deal frankly with pioneers of the Middle West; not such pioneers as Cooper had imagined in *The Prairie*, but such plain men and women as one might meet anywhere beyond the Alleghenies in 1850. Winthrop's *John Brent* (1862) and Eggleston's *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* and *The Circuit Rider* (1874) are so true to a real phase of American life that a thoughtful reader must wonder why they are not better known. They are certainly refreshing to one who tires of our present so-called realism with its abnormal or degenerate characters.



JOHN ESTEN COOKE

More widely read than any of the novelists just mentioned are certain others who appeared in answer to the increasing demand of young people for a good story. It is doubtful if any American writer great or small has given more pleasure to young readers than Louisa M. Alcott with her *Little Women* (1868) and other stories for girls, or John T. Trowbridge,

author of *Cudjo's Cave*, *Jack Hazard*, *A Chance for Himself* and several other juveniles that once numbered their boy readers by tens of thousands.



LOUISA M. ALCOTT

this, that he never was known to "go with the crowd," not even on the rare occasions when he believed the crowd to be right. He was one of the few persons who select their own way through life and follow it without the slightest regard for the world's opinion.

Numerous examples of Thoreau's oddity might be given, but we note here only his strange determination to view life with his own eyes. This may appear a simple matter until we reflect that most men measure life by what others have said or written concerning life's values. They accept the standards of

**Thoreau.** Among the many secondary writers of the period the most original and most neglected was Henry D. Thoreau (1817-1862), a man who differed greatly from other mortals in almost every respect, but chiefly in

their ancestors or their neighbors; they conform themselves to a world in which governments and other long-established institutions claim their allegiance; they are trained to win success in such a world by doing one thing well, and to measure their success by the fame or money or office or social position which they achieve by a lifetime of labor and self-denial.

His Originality Thoreau sharply challenged this whole conception of life, which, he said, was more a matter of habit than of reason or conviction. He saw in our social institutions as much of harm as of benefit to the individual. He looked with distrust on all traditions, saying that he had listened for thirty years without hearing one word of sound advice from his elders. He was a good workman and learned to do several things passing well; but he saw no reason why a free man should repeat himself daily in a world of infinite opportunities. Also he was a scholar, versed in classical lore and widely read in oriental literature; but unlike his friend Emerson he seldom quoted the ancients, being more concerned with his own thoughts of life than by the words of philosophers, and more fascinated by the wild birds that ate crumbs from his table than by all the fabled gods of mythology. As for success, the fame or money for which other men toiled seemed to him but empty bubbles; the only wealth he prized was his soul's increase in love and understanding: "If the day



HENRY D. THOREAU

and the night are such that you greet them with joy, and life emits a fragrance like sweet-scented herbs—is more elastic, starry and immortal—that is your success."

There are other interesting matters in Thoreau's philosophy, but these will appear plainly enough to one who reads his own record. His best-known work is *Walden* (1854), a

*Walden* journal in which he recorded what he saw or thought or felt during the two years when he abandoned society to live in a hut on the shore of Walden Pond, near his native village of Concord. If there be any definite lesson in the book, it is the proof of Thoreau's theory that simplicity is needed for happiness, that men would be better off with fewer possessions, and that earning one's living should be a matter of pleasure rather than of endless toil and anxiety. What makes *Walden* valuable, however, is not its theories but its revelation of an original mind fronting the facts of life, its gleams of poetry and philosophy, its startling paradoxes, its first-hand impressions of the world, its nuggets of sense or humor, and especially its intimate observation of the little wild neighbors in feathers or fur who shared Thoreau's solitude. It is one of the few books in American literature that successive generations have read with profit to themselves and with increasing respect for the original genius who wrote it.

**The Historians.** The honored names of Bancroft, Sparks, Prescott, Motley and Parkman are indicative of the importance attached to history-writing in America ever since Colonial days, and of the remarkably fine and sometimes heroic quality of American historians. Another matter suggested by these names is the changing standard or ideal of historical writing. In an earlier time history was a dry chronicle of important events, or of such events as seemed important to the chronicler; at the present day it threatens to degenerate into an equally dry chronicle of economic forces; and between these thirsty extremes are various highly colored records glorifying kings or conquerors or political parties as the chief things of history.

These American historians had a different standard. They first consulted all available records to be sure of the facts or **The Epic of History** events. Then they closely examined the scene in which the event had come to pass, knowing that environment is always a factor in human history. Finally they studied historical personages, not as others had described them but as they revealed themselves in letters, diaries, speeches, — personal records revealing human motives that all men understand, because man is everywhere the same. From such a combination of event, scene and characters our historians wrote a dramatic narrative, giving it the heroic cast without which history, the prose epic of liberty, is little better than a dull catalogue. Another very important matter was that they cultivated their style as well as their knowledge; they were literary men no less than historians, and in the conviction that the first object of literature is to give pleasure they produced works that have charmed as well as instructed a multitude of readers. There are chapters in Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico* and *Conquest of Peru* over which one must sit up late, as over a novel of Scott; in Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic* and *History of the United Netherlands* there are scores of glowing passages dealing with great characters or great events which stir the reader like a tale of gallant adventure.

Prescott deals with force in action, and the action at times seems to be an exaltation of violence and cruelty. Motley also delights in action; but he is at heart an apostle of liberty, or perhaps we should say, of the American ideal of liberty, and his narrative often assumes the character of a partisan chant of freedom.

To the native, at least, Francis Parkman (1823-1893) is probably the most interesting of our historians, partly because **Parkman** of his lucid style and partly because of his American theme. Early in life he selected his subject (the Old French Wars) and spent the best part of forty years in making himself familiar not only with what occurred during

the struggle between France and England for possession of the New World, but also with the primeval scene and all the motley characters of the fateful drama. It is doubtful if any other historian ever had a more minute knowledge of his subject; and the astonishing, the heroic part of the matter is that he attained this vast knowledge in spite of the handicap of almost constant suffering and blindness. In a dozen volumes

he tells his story,—volumes crowded with action or adventure, and written in such a vividly convincing style that one has the impression that Parkman must have been an eye-witness of the events which he describes.

Among these volumes the second part of *Pioneers of France in the New World* and *La Salle and the Discovery of the Great West* are recommended to the



FRANCIS PARKMAN

beginner. The former deals with the career of Champlain, who opened the way for future settlements in the North; the latter with one of the most adventurous, lion-hearted men that ever cheerfully faced toil and endless danger. Standing apart from Parkman's main theme is a single volume, *The California and Oregon Trail* (1849), which recounts the picturesque incidents of the author's trip through the Northwest, then an unknown country, with a tribe of unspoiled Indians. Those who like a tale of adventure need not go to fiction to find it, for it is here

in Parkman's narrative,—a tale of care-free wandering amid plains or mountains and, what is historically more important, a picture of a vanished life that will never be seen here again.

**Summary.** The period of conflict has no definite limits on either side, but for convenience we may think of it as included between the years 1840 and 1876. Its earlier years were filled with an ever-increasing agitation of the questions of slavery and state rights; its center was the Civil War; its close was the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia, which we have selected as an outward symbol of a reunited country.

The most noticeable feature of the age, apart from the great war, was its ceaseless political turmoil. Of deeper significance to the student of literature was the profound mental unrest which showed itself in reform movements, in various communistic societies like Brook Farm, in an eager interest in the poetry of other nations, in the establishment of college professorships of foreign literatures, in the philosophical doctrine of transcendentalism, and in many other efforts of mid-century Americans to enlarge their mental horizon.

A host of minor writings of the period reflect the sectional passions or interests that stirred our people deeply at the time, but that are now almost forgotten. The comparatively small body of major literature was concerned with the permanent ideals of America or with the simple human feelings that have no age or nationality. In general, it was a time of poetry rather than of prose, being distinguished above all other periods of American literature by the number and quality of its poets.

Our detailed study of the age includes: (1) The major or so-called elder poets, Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, Holmes, Lanier and Whitman. (2) The life and work of Emerson, who was both poet and prose writer. (3) The career of Hawthorne, the novelist of Puritanism, who is commonly ranked at the head of American fiction-writers. (4) A brief review of the secondary writers of prose and verse. (5) An examination of the work of Thoreau, the most individualistic writer in an age of individualism, and of Parkman, whom we have selected as representative of the American historians.

**Selections for Reading.** Typical selections from minor writers of the period in Calhoun and MacAlarney, *Readings from American Literature*; Stedman and Hutchinson, *Library of American Literature*, and various other collections. Important works of all major writers are published in inexpensive editions for school use, a few of which are named below.

Longfellow's short poems, *Evangeline*, parts of *Hiawatha* and of *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, in *Riverside Literature*; selections from the narrative poems in *Lake English Classics*; selected poems in various other school series.

Whittier's *Snow Bound* and selected short poems, in *Riverside Literature*, Maynard's *English Classics*, etc.

Lowell's *Sir Launfal*, selected short poems and selected essays, in *Riverside Literature*, Maynard's *English Classics*.

Holmes's poems, selected, in Maynard's *English Classics*; *The Autocrat*, in *Everyman's Library*; selected prose and verse, in *Riverside Literature*.

Lanier's poems, with selections from *Timrod* and *Hayne*, in *Pocket Classics*, Maynard's *English Classics*, etc.

Whitman's poems, brief selections, in Maynard's *English Classics*; Triggs, *Selections from the Prose and Poetry of Walt Whitman*.

Emerson's poems, in *Riverside Literature*; *Representative Men* and selected essays, in *Pocket Classics*; *Nature* and various essays, in *Everyman's Library*.

Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables* and selected short stories, in *Pocket Classics*; *Twice-Told Tales* and other selections, in *Riverside Literature*.

Thoreau's *Walden*, in *Everyman's Library*; *Walden* and selections from other works, in *Riverside Literature*.

**Bibliography.** For extended works covering the field of American history and literature see the General Bibliography. The following works are useful in a special study of the period of conflict.

**History.** Rhodes, *History of the United States 1850-1877*, 7 vols.; Wilson, *Division and Reunion*; Stephens, *War between the States*; Paxson, *the Civil War*; Rhodes, *Lectures on the Civil War*; Hart, *Romance of the Civil War* (supplementary reading for young people). Lives of notable characters in American Statesmen, Great Commanders and other series. Grant, *Personal Memoirs*; Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War*; Alexander Stephens, *Recollections*; Hoar, *Autobiography*; Blaine, *Twenty Years in Congress*; Greeley, *Recollections*; Booker Washington, *Up from Slavery*.

**Literature.** The great period of American letters is still awaiting its historian. Brief chapters are found in Richardson, Trent, Cairns, Wendell and other general histories of our literature. Good essays on individual authors of the period in Stedman, *Poets of America*; Brownell, *American Prose Masters*; Erskine, *Leading American Novelists*; Vincent, *American Literary Masters*; Burton, *Literary Leaders of America*.

Frothingham's *Transcendentalism in New England* will throw light on the so-called Concord school. Howells's *Literary Friends and Acquaintance* is a fine appreciation of the Cambridge writers. Wauchoppe's *Writers of South Carolina* contains excellent studies of Timrod, Hayne, Simms and other writers of the Palmetto state. Moses' *Literature of the South* and Henneman's *Literary and Intellectual Life of the South* are among the best works devoted to southern authors exclusively.

*Longfellow.* Life, by Higginson, in *American Men of Letters*; by Carpenter (brief), in *Beacon Biographies*; by Robertson, in *Great Writers*; by S. Longfellow, 3 vols. (the standard biography). Essays by Stedman, in *Poets of America*; by Mrs. Fields, in *Authors and Friends*; by Curtis, in *Literary and Social Essays*; by Higginson, in *Old Cambridge*; by Howells, in *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*.

*Whittier.* Life, by Pickard, 2 vols.; by Carpenter, in *American Men of Letters*; by Higginson, in *English Men of Letters*; by Burton (brief), in *Beacon Biographies*; by Perry, by Underwood. Mrs. Claflin, *Personal Recollections of Whittier*; Hawkins, *the Mind of Whittier*; Fowler, *Whittier: Prophet, Seer and Man*; Pickard, *Whittier Land*. Essays, by Woodberry, in *Makers of Literature*; by Stedman, in *Poets of America*; by Higginson, in *Contemporaries*; by Hazeltine, in *Chats about Books*; by Mrs. Fields, in *Authors and Friends*.

*Lowell.* Life, by Greenslet; by Scudder, 2 vols.; by Hale (brief), in *Beacon Biographies*; by Underwood. Edward Everett Hale, James Russell Lowell and his Friends. Essays, by Higginson, in *Old Cambridge*; by Woodberry, in *Makers of Literature*; by Stedman, in *Poets of America*.

*Holmes.* Life, by Morse, 2 vols.; by Crothers, in *American Men of Letters*. Essays, by Stedman, in *Poets of America*; by Haweis, in *American Humorists*; by Noble, in *Impressions and Memories*; by Stearns, in *Cambridge Sketches*; by L. Stephen, in *Studies of a Biographer*.

*Lanier.* Life, by Mims, in *American Men of Letters*; by West; by Ward, in *Preface to Lanier's Poems* (1884). Essays, by Baskerville, in *Southern Writers*; by Higginson, in *Contemporaries*; by Gilman, in *South Atlantic Quarterly* (1905); by Ward, in *Century Magazine* (1888); by Northrup, in *Lippincott's* (1905).

*Whitman.* Life, by Perry; by Carpenter, in *English Men of Letters*; by Platt (brief), in *Beacon Biographies*; by Binns, by Bucke. Essays, by Stedman, in *Poets of America*; by Stevenson, in *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*; by Dowden, in *Studies in Literature*; by Santayana, in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*.

*Emerson.* Life, by Woodberry; by Cabot (*Memoir of Emerson*, 2 vols.); by O. W. Holmes, in *American Men of Letters*; by Garnett, in *Great Writers*; by Sanborn (brief), in *Beacon Biographies*. E. W. Emerson, *Emerson in Concord*; Conway, *Emerson at Home*. Essays, by Stedman, in *Poets of America*; by Mrs. Fields, in *Authors and Friends*; by Lowell, in *Literary Essays*; by Stearns, in *Sketches from Concord and Appledore*; by Everett, in *Essays Theological and Literary*; by Beers, in *Points at Issue*; by Chapman, in *Emerson and Other Essays*.

*Hawthorne.* Life, by Woodberry, in *American Men of Letters*; by Henry James, in *English Men of Letters*; by Fields (brief), in *Beacon Biographies*; by Conway, in *Great Writers*. A more intimate but doubtful biography is Julian Hawthorne's *Nathaniel Hawthorne and his Wife*.

Bridge, Personal Recollections of Hawthorne. Essays, by Brownell, in American Prose Masters; by Perry, in A Study of Prose Fiction; by Gates, in Studies and Appreciations; by L. Stephen, in Hours in a Library; by Higginson, in Short Studies of American Authors.

*Thoreau*. Life, by Salt, in Great Writers; by Sanborn, in American Men of Letters. Page, Thoreau: his Life and Aims. Essays by Higginson, in Short Studies of American Authors; by Stevenson, in Familiar Studies of Men and Books; by Lowell, in Literary Essays.

*Parkman*. Life, by Fiske; by Farnham; by Sedgwick. Essays. by Fiske, in introduction to Parkman's works and in A Century of Science and Other Essays; by Vedder, in American Writers of To-day; by Whipple, in Recollections of Eminent Men.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ALL-AMERICA PERIOD

Thou Mother with thy equal brood,  
Thou varied chain of different States, yet one identity only,  
A special song before I go I'd sing o'er all the rest:  
For thee, the Future.

Whitman, "Thou Mother"

Some critics find little or no American literature of a distinctly national spirit prior to 1876, and they explain the lack of it on the assumption that Americans were too far apart and too much occupied with local or sectional interests for any author to represent the nation. It was even said at the time of the Centennial Exposition that our countrymen had never met, save on the battlefields of the Civil War, until the common interest in Jubilee Year drew men and women from the four quarters of America "around the old family altar at Philadelphia."

Whatever exaggeration there may be in that fine poetic figure, it is certain that our literature, once confined to a few schools or centers, began in the decade after 1870 to be broadly representative of the whole country. Miller's *Songs of the Sierras*, Hay's *Pike-County Ballads*, Harte's *Tales of the Argonauts*, Cable's *Old Creole Days*, Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*, Miss Jewett's *Deephaven*, Stockton's *Rudder Grange*, Harris's *Uncle Remus*,—a host of surprising books suddenly appeared with the announcement that America was too large for any one man or literary school to be its spokesman. It is because of these new voices, coming from North, South, East or West and heard with delight by the whole nation, that we venture to call the years after 1876 the all-America period of our literature.

We are still too near that period to make a history of it, for the simple reason that a true history implies distance and **Contempo-** **perspective.** No historian could read, much less **rary History** measure and compare, a tenth part of the books that have won recognition since 1876. In such works as he might select as typical he must be governed by his own taste or judgment; and the writer was never born who could by such personal standards forecast the judgment of time and of humanity. In a word, contemporary or "up-to-date" histories are vain attempts at the impossible; save in the unimportant matter of chronicling names or dates they are all alike untrustworthy. The student should bear in mind, therefore, that the following summary of our recent literature is based largely upon personal opinion; that it selects a few authors by way of illustration, omitting many others who may be of equal or greater importance. We are confronted by a host of books that serve the prime purpose of literature by giving pleasure; but what proportion of them are enduring books, or what few of them will be known to readers of the next century as the *Sketch Book* and *Snow-Bound* are known to us,—these are questions that only Father Time can answer.

**The Short Story.** The period after 1876 has been called the age of fiction, but "the short-story age" might be a better name for it, since the short story is apparently more popular than any other form of literature and since it has been developed here more abundantly than in any other land,—possibly because America offers such an immense and ever-surprising field to an author in search of a strange or picturesque tale. Readers of the short story demand life and variety, and here are all races and tribes and conditions of men, living in all kinds of "atmosphere" from the trapper's hut to the steel skyscraper and from the crowded city slums to the vast open places where one's companionship is with the hills or the stars. Hence a double tendency in our recent stories, to make them expressive of New World life and to make each

story a reflection of some peculiar type of Americanism,— one of the many types that here meet in a common citizenship.

The truth of the above criticism may become evident by reviewing the history of the short story in America. Irving began with mere hints or outlines of stories (sketches he called them) and added a few legendary tales of the Dutch settlers on the Hudson.

Then came Poe, dealing with the phantoms of his own brain rather than with human life or endeavor. Next appeared Hawthorne, who dealt largely in moral allegories and whose tales are always told in an atmosphere of mystery and twilight shadows. Finally, after the war, came a multitude of writers who insisted on dealing with our American life as

it is, with miners, immigrants, money kings, mountaineers, planters, cowboys, woodsmen,— a host of varied characters, each speaking the speech and typifying the customs or ideals of his particular locality. It was these *post-bellum* writers who invented the so-called story of local color (a story true to a certain place or a certain class of men), which is America's most original contribution to the world's literature.



BRET HARTE

Francis Bret Harte (1839-1902) is generally credited with the invention of the local-color story; but he was probably indebted to earlier works of the same kind, notably **Bret Harte** to Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes* (1836) and Baldwin's *Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi* (1853). He had followed the "forty-niners" to California in a headlong

search for gold when, finding himself amid the picturesque scenes and characters of the early mining camps, it suddenly occurred to him that he had before his eyes a literary gold mine such as no other modern romancer had discovered. Thereupon he wrote "The Luck of Roaring Camp" (first published in *The Overland Monthly*, 1868), and followed it with "The Outcasts of Poker Flat" and "Tennessee's Partner."

These stories took the literary world by storm,



GEORGE W. CABLE

and almost overnight Harte became a celebrity. Following up his advantage he proceeded to write some thirty volumes of the same general kind, which were widely read and promptly forgotten. Though he was plainly too sentimental and sensational, there was a sense of freshness or originality in his early stories and poems which made them wonderfully attractive. His first three tales were probably his best, and they are still worth reading, — not for their literary charm or truth but as interesting early examples of the local-color story.

The interest aroused by the mining-camp tales influenced other American writers to discover the neglected literary wealth of their several localities; but they were fortunately on guard against Harte's exaggerated sentimentality and related their stories with more art and more truth to nature. As a specific example read Cable's *Old Creole Days* and *Madame Delphine* with their exquisite pictures of life in the old French city of New Orleans. These are romances or creations of fancy, to be sure; but in their lifelike characters, their natural scenes and soft Creole dialect they are as realistic (that is, as true to a real type of American life) as anything that can be found in literature. They are, in fact, studies as well as stories, such minute and affectionate studies of old people, old names and old customs as the great French novelist Balzac made in preparation for his work. Though time holds its own secrets, one can hardly avoid the conviction that *Old Creole Days* and *Madame Delphine* are not books of a day but permanent additions to American fiction.

Cable was accompanied by so many other good writers that it would require a volume to do them justice. We name only,

Typical by way of indicating the wide variety that awaits Story-Writers the reader, the charming stories of Grace King and Kate Chopin dealing with plantation life; the New England stories, powerful or brilliant or somber, of Sarah Orne Jewett, Rose Terry Cooke and Mary E. Wilkins; the tender and cheery southern stories of Thomas Nelson Page; the impressive stories of mountaineer life by Mary Noailles Murfree (Charles Egbert Craddock); the humorous, *Alice-in-Wonderland* kind of stories told by Frank Stockton; and a bewildering miscellany of other works, of which the names Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Hamlin Garland, Alice French (Octave Thanet), Rowland Robinson, Frank Norris and Henry C. Bunner are as a brief but inviting index.

It would be unjust at the present time to discriminate among these writers or to compare them with others, perhaps

equally good, whom we have not named. Occasionally in the flood of short stories appears one that compels attention. Aldrich's "Marjorie Daw," Edward Everett Hale's "The Man without a Country," Stockton's "The Lady or the Tiger,"—each of these impresses us so forcibly by its delicate artistry or appeal to patriotism or whimsical ending that we hail it as

a new classic, forgetting that the term "classic" carries with it the implication of something old and proved, safe from change or criticism. Undoubtedly a few of our recent stories deserve the name; they will be more widely known a century hence than they are now, and may finally rank above "Rip Van Winkle" or "The Gold Bug" or "The Snow Image"; but until the



MARY E. WILKINS-FREEMAN

perfect tale is sifted from the thousand that are almost perfect, every ambitious critic is free to make his own prophecy.

**Some Recent Novelists.** There is a difference between our earlier and later fiction which becomes apparent when we compare specific examples. As a type of the earlier novel take Cooper's *The Spy* or Longfellow's *Hyperion* or Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* or Simms's *Katherine Walton* or Cooke's *The Virginia Comedians*, and read it in connection with a recent novel, such as Howells's *Annie Kilburn* or Miss Jewett's *Deephaven* or Harold Frederick's *Illumination*

or James Lane Allen's *The Reign of Law* or Frank Norris's *The Octopus*. Disregarding the important element of style, we note that the earlier novels have a distant background in time or space; that their chief interest lies in the story they have to tell; that they take us far away from present reality into regions where people are more impressive and sentiments more exalted than in our familiar, prosaic world. The later novels interest us less by the story than by the analysis of character; they deal with human life as it is here and now, not as we imagine it to have been elsewhere or in a golden age. In a word, our later novels are realistic in purpose, and in this respect they are in marked contrast with our novels of an earlier age, which are nearly all of the romantic kind.<sup>1</sup>

The realistic movement in American fiction began, as we have noted, with the short-story writers; and presently the most talented of these writers, having learned the value of real scenes and characters, turned to the novel and produced works having the double interest of romance and realism; that is, they told an old romantic tale of love or heroism and set it amid scenes or characters that were typical of American life. Miss Jewett's novels of northern village life, for example, are even finer than her short stories in the same field. The same criticism applies to Miss Murfree with her novels of mountainer life in Tennessee, to James Lane Allen with his novels of his native Kentucky, and to many another recent novelist who tells a brave tale of his own people. We call these, in the conventional way, novels of New England or the South or the West; in reality they are novels of humanity, of the old unchanging tragedies or comedies of human life, which seem more true or real to us because they appear in a familiar setting.

There is another school of realism which subordinates the story element, which avoids as untrue all unusual or heroic

<sup>1</sup> In the above comparison we have ignored a large number of recent novels that are quite as romantic as any written before the war. Romance is still, as in all past ages, more popular than realism: witness the millions of readers of Lew Wallace, E. P. Roe and other modern romancers.

incidents and deals with ordinary men or women ; and of this school William Dean Howells is a conspicuous example. Judging him by his novels alone it would be difficult to determine his rank ; but judging him by his high aim and distinguished style (a style remarkable for its charm and purity in an age too much influenced by newspaper slang and smartness) he is certainly one of the best of our recent prose writers. Since his



WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

first modest volume appeared in 1860 he has published many poems, sketches of travel, appreciations of literature, parlor comedies, novels,—an immense variety of writings ; but whatever one reads of his sixty-odd books, whether *Venetian Life* or *A Boys' Town*, one has the impression of an author who lives for literature, who puts forth no hasty or unworthy work, and who aims steadily to be true to the best traditions of American letters.

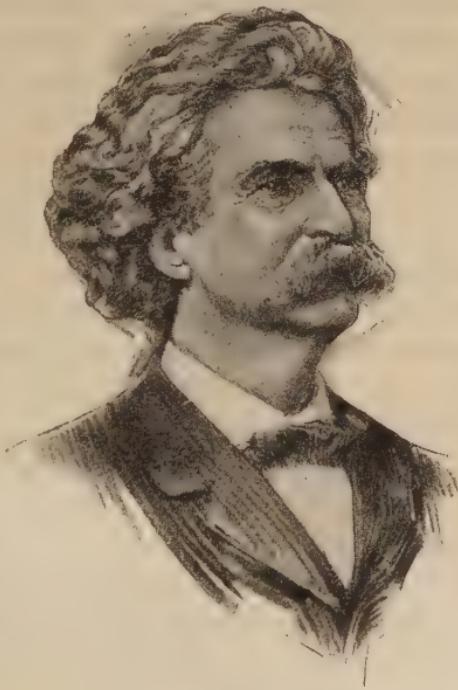
In middle life Howells turned definitely to fiction and wrote, among various other novels, *A Woman's Reason*, *The Minister's Charge*, *A Modern Instance* and *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. These are all realistic in that they deal frankly with contemporary life ; but in their plots and conventional endings they differ but little from the typical romance.<sup>1</sup> Then Howells

<sup>1</sup> Several of Howells's earlier novels deal with New England life, but superficially and without understanding. However minutely they depict its manners or mannerisms they seldom dip beneath the surface. If the reader wants not the body but the soul of New England, he must go to some other fiction writer, to Sarah Orne Jewett, for example, or to Rose Terry Cooke.

fell under the influence of Tolstoi and other European realists, and his later novels, such as *Annie Kilburn*, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* and *The Quality of Mercy*, are rather aimless studies of the speech, dress, mannerisms and inanities of American life with precious little of its ideals,—which are the only things of consequence, since they alone endure. He appears here as the photographer rather than the painter of American life, and his work has the limited interest of another person's family album.

Another realist of a very different kind is Samuel L. Clemens (1835-1910), who is more widely known by his pseudonym of Mark Twain. He grew up, he tells us, in "a loafing, down-at-the-heels town in Missouri"; he was educated "on the river," and in most of his work he attempted to deal with the rough-and-ready life which he knew intimately at first hand. His *Life on the Mississippi*, a vivid delineation of river scenes and characters, is perhaps his best work, or at least the most true to his aim and his experience. *Roughing It* is another volume from his store of personal observation, this time in the western mining camps; but here his realism goes as far astray from truth as any old romance in that it exaggerates even the sensational elements of frontier life.

The remaining works of Mark Twain are, with one or two exceptions, of very doubtful value. Their great popularity for



MARK TWAIN

a time was due largely to the author's reputation as a humorist, — a strange reputation it begins to appear, for he was at heart a pessimist, an iconoclast, a thrower of stones, and with the exception of his earliest work, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog* (1867), which reflected some rough fun or horseplay, it is questionable whether the term "humorous" can properly be applied to any of his books. Thus the blatant *Innocents Abroad* is not a work of humor but of ridicule (a very different matter), which jeers at travelers who profess admiration for the scenery or institutions of Europe, — an admiration that was a sham to Mark Twain because he was incapable of understanding it. So with the grotesque capers of *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*, with the sneering spirit of *The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg*, with the labored attempts to be funny of *Adam's Diary* and with other alleged humorous works; readers of the next generation may ask not what we found to amuse us in such works but how we could tolerate such crudity or cynicism or bad taste in the name of American humor.

The most widely read of Mark Twain's works are *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. The former, a glorification of a liar and his dime-novel adventures, has enough descriptive power to make the story readable, but hardly enough to disguise its sensationalism, its lawlessness, its false standards of boy life and American life. In *Huckleberry Finn*, a much better book, the author depicts the life of the Middle West as seen by a homeless vagabond. With a runaway slave as a companion the hero, Huck Finn, drifts down the Mississippi on a raft, meeting with startling experiences at the hands of quacks and imposters of every kind. One might suppose, if one took this picaresque record seriously, that a large section of our country was peopled wholly by knaves and fools. The adventures are again of a sensational kind; but the characters are powerfully drawn, and the vivid pictures of the mighty river by day or night are among the best examples of descriptive writing in our literature.

Still another type of realism is suggested by the names Stephen Crane and Frank Norris. These young writers, influenced by the French novelist Zola, condemned the old romance as false and proclaimed, somewhat grandly at first, that they would tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Then they straightway forgot that health and moral sanity are the truth of life, and proceeded to deal with degraded or degenerate characters as if these were typical of humanity. Their earlier works are studies of brutality, miscalled realism ; but later Crane wrote his *Red Badge of Courage* (a rather wildly imaginative story of the Civil War), and Norris produced works of real power in *The Octopus* and *The Pit*, one a prose epic of the railroad, the other of a grain of wheat from the time it is sown in the ground until it becomes a matter of good food or of crazy speculation. There is an impression of vastness, of continental breadth and sweep, in these two novels which sets them apart from all other fiction of the period.

The flood of dialect stories which appeared after 1876 may seem at first glance to be mere variations of Bret Harte's local-color stories, but they are something more and better than that. The best of them—such, for example, as Page's *In Ole Virginia* or Rowland Robinson's *Danvis Folk*—are written on the assumption that we can never understand a man, that is, the soul of a man, unless we know the very language in which he expresses his thought or feeling. These dialect stories, therefore, are intimate studies of American life rather than of local speech or manners.

Joel Chandler Harris (1848–1908) is not our best writer of dialect stories but only the happy and most fortunate man who wrote *Uncle Remus* (1880), and wrote it, by the way, as part of his day's work as a newspaper man, without a thought that it was a masterpiece, a work of genius. The first charm of the book is that it fascinates children with its frolicsome adventures of Brer Rabbit, Brer Tarrypin, Brer

B'ar, Brer Fox and the wonderful Tar Baby ; the second, that it combines in a remarkable way a primitive or universal with a local and intensely human interest. Thus, almost everybody is interested in folklore, especially in the animal stories which are part of the tradition of every primitive tribe ; but folklore, as commonly written, is not a branch of fiction but of science. Before it can enter the golden door of literature it must find

or create some human character who interests us not by his stories but by his humanity ; and Harris furnished this character in the person of Uncle Remus, a very lovable old plantation negro, drawn with absolute fidelity to life.

Other novelists have portrayed a negro in fiction, but Harris did a more original work by creating his Brer Rabbit. In the adventures of this happy-go-lucky creature, with

A black and white portrait of Joel Chandler Harris. He is a middle-aged man with dark hair and a mustache, wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a dark bow tie. The portrait is set against a light, textured background.

JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS

his childishness and humor, we have the symbol not of any one negro but of the whole race of negroes as the author knew them intimately in a condition of servitude. The creation of these two original characters, as real as Poor Richard or Natty Bumppo and far more fascinating, is one of the most notable achievements of American fiction.

Aside from the realistic movement, our recent fiction is like a river flowing sluggishly over hidden bowlders : the surface is so broken by whirlpools, eddies and aimless flotsam that it is

difficult to determine the main current. Here our attention is attracted by clever stories of "society in the making," there by somber problem-novels dealing with city slums, Problem Novels lonely farms, department stores, political rings, business corruption, religious creeds, social injustice, — with every conceivable matter that can furnish a novelist not with a story but with a cry for reform. The propaganda novel is evidently a favorite in America; but whether it has any real influence in reforming abuses, as the novels of Dickens led to better schools and prisons in England, is yet to be determined.

Occasionally appears a reform novel great enough to make us forget the reform, such as Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* (1884). This famous story began as an attempt to plead the cause of the oppressed Indian, to do for him what *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was supposed to have done for the negro; it ended in an idyllic story so well told that readers forgot to cry, "Lo, the poor Indian," as the author intended. At the present time *Ramona* is not classed with the problem-novels but with the most readable of American romances.

While the new realistic novel occupied the attention of critics the old romance had, as usual, an immensely larger number of readers. Moral romances with a happy ending have always been popular, and of these Popular Romances E. P. Roe furnished an abundance. His *Barriers Burned Away*, *A Face Illumined*, *Opening of a Chestnut Burr* and *Nature's Serial Story* depict American characters in an American landscape, and have a wholesome atmosphere of manliness and cleanness that makes them eminently "safe" reading. Unfortunately they are melodramatic and sentimental, and critics commonly sneer or jeer at them; but that is not a rational criticism. Romances that won instant welcome from a host of readers and that are still widely known after half a century have at least "the power to live"; and vitality, the quality that makes a character or a story endure, is always one of the marks of a good romance.

Another romancer untouched by the zeal for realism was Marion Crawford, who in a very interesting essay, *The Novel*, proclaimed with some show of reason that the novel was simply a "pocket theater," a convenient stage whereon the reader could enjoy by himself any comedy or tragedy that pleased him. That Crawford lived abroad the greater part of his life and was familiar with society in a dozen countries may explain the fact that his forty-odd novels are nearly all of the social kind. His Roman novels, *Saracinesca*, *Sant' Ilario* and a dozen others, are perhaps his best work. They are good stories; they take us among cultured foreign people and give us glimpses of a life that is hidden from most travelers; but they are superficial and leave the impression that the author was a man without much heart, that he missed the deeper meanings of life because he had little interest in them. His characters are as puppets that are sent through a play for our amusement and for no other reason. In this, however, he remained steadily true to his own ideal of fiction as a convenient substitute for the theater. Moreover, he was a good workman; his stories were for the most part well composed and very well written.

More popular even than the romances of Roe and Crawford are the stories with a background of Colonial or Revolutionary history, a type to which America has ever given hearty welcome. Ford's *Janice Meredith*, Mitchell's *Hugh Wynne*, Mary Johnston's *To Have and to Hold*, Maurice Thompson's *Alice of Old Vincennes*, Churchill's *Richard Carvel*, — the reader can add to the list of recent historical romances almost indefinitely; but no critic can now declare which shall be called great among them. To the same interesting group of writers belong Lew Wallace, whose enormously popular *Ben Hur* has obscured his better story, *The Fair God*, and Mary Hartwell Catherwood, whose *Lady of Fort St. John* and other stirring tales of the Northwest have the same savage wilderness background against which Parkman wrote his histories.

For other romances of the period we have no convenient term except to call them old-fashioned. Such, for instance, are Blanche Willis Howard's *One Summer* and Arthur Sherburne Hardy's *Passe Rose* and *But Yet a Woman*,—pleasant, leisurely, exquisitely finished romances, which belong to no particular time or place and which deserve the fine old name of romance, because they seem to grow young rather than old with the passing years.

**Poetry since 1876.** It is commonly assumed that the last half century has been almost exclusively an age of prose. The student of literature knows, on the contrary, that one difficulty of judging our recent poetry lies in the amount and variety of it. Since 1876 more poetry has been published here than in all the previous years of our history; and the quality of it, if one dare judge it as a whole, is surprisingly good. The designation of "the prose age," therefore, should not blind us to the fact that America never had so many poets as at present. Whether a future generation will rank any of these among our elder poets is another question. Of late years we have had no singer to compare with Longfellow, to be sure; but we have had a dozen singers who reflect the enlarging life of America in a way of which Longfellow never dreamed. He lived mostly in the past and was busy with legends, folklore, songs of the night; our later singers live in the present and write songs of the day. And this suggests the chief characteristic of recent poetry; namely, that it aims to be true to life as it is here and now rather than to life as it was romantically supposed to be in classic or medieval times.<sup>1</sup>

This emancipation of our poetry from the past, with the loss and gain which such a change implies, was not easily accomplished, and the terrible reality of the great war was

<sup>1</sup> The above characterization applies only to the best, or to what most critics deem best, of our recent poetry. It takes no account of a large mass of verse which leaves an impression of faddishness in the matter of form or phrase or subject. Such verse appeals to the taste of the moment, but Time has an effective way of dealing with it and with all other insincerities in literature.

perhaps the decisive factor in the struggle. Before the war our poetry was largely conventional, imitative, sentimental; and even after the war, when Miller's *Songs of the Sierras* and John Hay's *Pike-County Ballads* began to sing, however crudely, of vigorous life, the acknowledged poets and critics of the time were scandalized. Thus, to read the letters of Bayard Taylor is to meet a poet who bewails the lack of poetic material in America and who "hungers," as he says, for the

romance and beauty of other lands. He writes *Songs of the Orient*, *Lars: a Pastoral of Norway*, *Prince Deukalion* and many other volumes which seem to indicate that poetry is to be found everywhere save at home. Even his "Song of the Camp" is located in the Crimea, as if heroism and tenderness had not recently bloomed on a hundred southern battlefields. So also Stedman wrote his *Alectryon* and *The Blameless Prince*, and Aldrich



EDMUND CLARENCE STEDMAN

spent his best years in making artificial nosegays (as Holmes told him frankly) when he ought to have been making poems. These and many other poets said proudly that they belonged to the classic school; they all read Shelley and Keats, dreamed of medieval or classic beauty, and in unnumbered reviews condemned the crudity of those who were trying to find beauty at their own doors and to make poetry of the stuff of American life.

It was the war, or rather the new American spirit that issued from the war, which finally assured these poets and

critics that mythology and legend were, so far as America was concerned, as dead as the mastodon, and that life itself Stedman and was the only vitally interesting subject of poetry. Aldrich Edmund Clarence Stedman (1833-1908), after writing many "finished" poems that were praised and forgotten, manfully acknowledged that he had been following the wrong trail and turned at last to the poetry of his own people. His *Alice of Monmouth*, an idyl of the war, and a few short pieces, such as "Wanted: a Man," are the only parts of his poetical works that are now remembered. Thomas Bailey Aldrich (1836-1907) went through the same transformation. He had a love of formal beauty, and in the exquisite finish of his verse has had few rivals in American poetry; but he spent the great part of his life in making pretty trifles. Then he seemed to waken to the meaning of poetry as a noble expression of the truth or beauty of this present life, and his last little book of *Songs and Sonnets* contains practically all that is worth remembering of his eight or nine volumes of verse.

One of the first in time of the new singers was Cincinnatus Heine Miller or, as he is commonly known, Joaquin Miller Joaquin Miller (1841-1912). His *Songs of the Sierras* (1871) and other poems of the West have this advantage, that they come straight from the heart of a man who has shared the stirring life he describes and who loves it with an



THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

overmastering love. To read his *My Own Story* or the preface to his *Ship in the Desert* is to understand from what fullness of life came lines like these:

Room! room to turn round in, to breathe and be free,  
To grow to be giant, to sail as at sea  
With the speed of the wind on a steed with his mane  
To the wind, without pathway or route or a rein.  
Room! room to be free, where the white-bordered sea  
Blows a kiss to a brother as boundless as he;  
Where the buffalo come like a cloud on the plain,  
Pouring on like the tide of a storm-driven main,  
And the lodge of the hunter to friend or to foe  
Offers rest, and unquestioned you come or you go.  
My plains of America! seas of wild lands! . . .  
I turn to you, lean to you, lift you my hands.

Indeed, there was a splendid promise in Miller, but the promise was never fulfilled. He wrote voluminously, feeling that he must express the lure and magic of the boundless West; but he wrote so carelessly that the crude bulk of his verse obscures the originality of his few inspired lines. To read the latter is to be convinced that he was a true poet who might have accomplished a greater work than Whitman, since he had more genius and manliness than the eastern poet possessed; but his personal oddities, his zeal for reforms, his love of solitude, his endless quest after some unnamed good which kept him living among the Indians or wandering between Mexico and the ends of Alaska, — all this hindered his poetic development. It may be that an Indian-driven arrow, which touched his brain in one of his numerous adventures, had something to do with his wanderings and his failure.

There is a poetry of thought that can be written down in words, and there is another poetry of glorious living, keenly felt in the winds of the wilderness or the rush of a splendid horse or the flight of a canoe through the rapids, for which there is no adequate expression. Miller could feel superbly this poetry of the mountaineer, the plainsman and the voyageur;

that he could even suggest or half reveal it to others makes him worthy to be named among our most original singers.

The hundred other poets of the period are too near for criticism, too varied even for classification; but we may at least note two or three significant groupings. In one

**Irwin Russell** group are the dialect poets, who attempt to make poetry serve the same end as fiction of the local-color school.

Irwin Russell, with his gay negro songs tossed off to the twanging accompaniment of his banjo, belongs in this group. His verses are notable not for their dialect (others have done that better) but for their fidelity to the negro character as Russell had observed it in the old plantation days. There is little of poetic beauty in his work; it is chiefly remarkable for its promise, for its opening of a new field of poesie; but unfortunately the promise was spoiled by the author's fitful life and his untimely death.



JOAQUIN MILLER

Closely akin to the dialect group in their effective use of the homely speech of country people are several popular poets, of **Carleton and Riley** whom Will Carleton and James Whitcomb Riley are the most conspicuous. Carleton's "Over the Hills to the Poorhouse" and other early songs won him a wide circle of readers; whereupon he followed up his advantage with *Farm Ballads* and other volumes filled with rather crude but sincere verses of home and childhood. For half a century these sentimental poems were as popular as the early works of Longfellow,

and they are still widely read by people who like homely themes and plenty of homely sentiment in their poetry.

Riley won an even larger following with his *Old Swimmin' Hole*, *Rhymes of Childhood Days* and a dozen other volumes that aimed to reflect in rustic language the joys and sorrows of country people. Judged by the number of his readers he would be called the chief poet of the period; but judged by the quality of his work it would seem that he wrote too much, and wrote too often "with his eye on the gallery." He was primarily an entertainer, a platform favorite, and in his impersonation of country folk was always in danger of giving his audience what he thought they would like, not what he sincerely felt to be true. Hence the impression of the stage and a "make-up" in a considerable part of his work. At times, however, Riley could forget the platform and speak from the heart as a plain man to plain men. His work at such moments has a deeper note, more simple and sincere, and a few of his poems will undoubtedly find a permanent place in American letters. The best feature of his work is that he felt no need to go far afield, to the Orient or to mythology, but found the beauty of fine feeling at his door and dared to call one of his collections *Poems Here at Home*.

In a third group of recent poets are those who try to reflect the feeling of some one type or race of the many that make **Typical Poets** up the sum total of American life. Such are Emma Lazarus, speaking finely for the Jewish race, and Paul Lawrence Dunbar, voicing the deeper life of the negro, — not the negro of the old plantation but the negro who was once a slave and must now prove himself a man. In the same group we are perhaps justified in placing Lucy Larcom, singing for the mill girls of New England, and Eugene Field, who shows what fun and sentiment may brighten the life of a busy newspaper man in a great city.

Finally come a larger number of poets who cannot be grouped, who sing each of what he knows or loves best:

Celia Thaxter, of the storm-swept northern ocean; Madison Cawein, of nature in her more tender moods; Edward Rowland Sill, of the aspirations of a rare Puritan soul. More varied in their themes are Edith Thomas, Emily Dickinson, Henry C. Bunner, Richard Watson Gilder, George Edward Woodberry, William Vaughn Moody, Richard Hovey, and several others who are perhaps quite as notable as any of those whom we have too briefly reviewed. They all sing of American life in its wonderful complexity and have added poems of real merit to the book of recent American verse. And that is a very good book to read, more inspiring and perhaps more enduring than the popular book of prose fiction.

**Miscellaneous Prose.** The historian who is perplexed by our recent poetry or fiction must be overwhelmed by the flood of miscellaneous works covering every field of human endeavor. As one who wanders through a forest has no conception of the forest itself but only of individual trees, so the reader of latter-day literature can form no distinct impression of it as a whole but must linger over the individual authors who happen to attract his attention. Hence in all studies of contemporary literature we have the inevitable confusion of what is important with what merely seems so because of its nearness or newness or appeal to our personal interests. The reader is amused by a *David Harum*, or made thoughtful by a *Looking Backward*, or wonderstruck by a *Life of Lincoln* as big as a ten-volume history; and he thinks, "This is surely a book to live." But a year passes and *David Harum* is eclipsed by a more popular hero of fiction, *Looking Backward* is relegated to the shelf of forgotten tracts, and Nicolay and Hay's "monumental" biography becomes a source book, which someone, it is to be hoped, will some day use in making a life of Lincoln that will be worthy of the subject and of the name of literature.

There is one feature in our recent literature, however, which attracts the attention of all critics; namely, the number of nature writers who have revealed to us the beauty of our

natural environment, as Ruskin awakened his readers to the beauty of art and Joaquin Miller to the unsung glory of the **Nature Writers** pioneers. In this respect, of adding to our enjoyment of human life by a new valuation of all life, our nature literature has no parallel in any age or nation.

To be specific, one must search continental literatures carefully to find even a single book that belongs unmistakably to the outdoor school. In English literature we find several poets who sing occasionally of the charms of nature, but only two books in fourteen centuries of writing that deal frankly with the great outdoors for its own sake: one is Isaac Walton's *Complete Angler* (1653), the other Gilbert White's *Natural History of Selborne* (1789).<sup>1</sup> In American literature the story is shorter but of the same tenor until recent times. From the beginning we have had many journals of exploration; but though the joy of wild nature is apparent in such writings, they were written to increase our knowledge, not our pleasure in life. Josselyn's *New England's Rarities* (1672), Alexander Wilson's *American Ornithology* (1801), Audubon's *Birds of America* (1827), — these were our nearest approach to nature books until Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) called attention to the immense and fascinating field which our writers had so long overlooked.

Thoreau, it will be remembered, was neglected by his own generation; but after the war, when writers began to use the picturesque characters of plantation or mining camp as the material for a new American literature, then the living world of nature seemed suddenly opened to their vision. Bradford Torrey, himself a charming nature writer, edited Thoreau's journals, and lo! these neglected chronicles became precious because the eyes of America were at last opened. Maurice Thompson wrote as a poet and scholar in the presence of

<sup>1</sup> There were other works of a scientific nature, and some of exploration, but no real nature books until the first notable work of Richard Jefferies (one of the best of nature writers) appeared in 1878. By that time the nature movement in America was well under way.

nature, John Muir as a reverent explorer, and William Hamilton Gibson as an artist with an eye single to beauty; then in rapid succession came Charles Abbott, Rowland Robinson, John Burroughs, Olive Thorne Miller, Florence Bailey, Frank Bolles, and a score more of a somewhat later generation. Most of these are frankly nature writers, not scientists; they aim not simply to observe the shy, fleeting life of the woods or fields but to reflect that life in such a way as to give us a new pleasure by awakening a new sense of beauty.

It is a remarkable spectacle, this rediscovery of nature in an age supposed to be given over to materialism, and its influence appears in every branch of our literature. The nature writers have evidently done a greater work than they knew; they have helped a multitude of people to enjoy the beauty of a flower without pulling it to pieces for a Latin name, to appreciate a living bird more than a stuffed skin, and to understand what Thoreau meant when he said that the *anima* of an animal is the only interesting thing about him. Because they have given us a new valuation of life, a new sense of its sacredness and mystery, their work may appeal to a future generation as the most original contribution to recent literature.

Another interesting feature of recent times is the importance attached to historical and biographical works, which have increased so rapidly since 1876 that there is now no period of American life and no important character or event that lacks its historian. The number of such works is astonishing, but their general lack of style and broad human interest places them outside of the field of literature. The tendency of recent historical writing, for example, is to collect facts *about* persons or events rather than to reproduce the persons or events so vividly that the past lives again before our eyes. The result of such writing is to make history a puppet show in which dead figures are moved about by unseen economic forces; meanwhile the only record that lives

in literature is the one that represents history as it really was in the making; that is, as a drama of living, self-directing men.

There is at least one recent historian, however, whose style gives distinction to his work and makes it worthy of especial notice. This is John Fiske (1842-1901), whose field and method are both unusual. He began as a student of law and philosophy, and his first notable book, *Outlines of Cosmic*

*Philosophy*, attracted instant attention in England and America by its literary style and rare lucidity of statement. It was followed by a series of essays, such as *The Idea of God*, *The Destiny of Man* and *The Origin of Evil*, which were so far above others of their kind that for a time they were in danger of becoming popular. Of a thousand works occasioned by the theory of evolution, when that theory was a nine days' wonder, they are among



A black and white portrait engraving of John Fiske. He is a middle-aged man with a full, dark beard and mustache. He has receding hair and is wearing round-rimmed glasses. He is dressed in a dark suit jacket over a white collared shirt. The portrait is set against a light, textured background.

JOHN FISKE

the very few that stand the test of time by affording as much pleasure and surprise as when they were first written.

It was comparatively late in life that our philosopher turned historian, and his first work in this field, *American Political Ideals Viewed from the Standpoint of Universal History*, announced that here at last was a writer with broad horizons, who saw America not as an isolated nation making a strange experiment but as adding a vital chapter to the great world's

history. It was a surprising work, unlike any other in the field of American history, and it may fall to another generation to appreciate its originality. Finally Fiske took up the study of particular periods or epochs, viewed them with the same deep insight, the same broad sympathy, and reflected them in a series of brilliant narratives: *Old Virginia and her Neighbors*, *The Beginnings of New England*, *Dutch and Quaker Colonies in America* and a few others, the series ending chronologically with *A Critical Period of American History*, the "critical" period being the time of doubt and struggle over the Constitution. These narratives, though not unified, form a fairly complete history from the Colonial period to the formation of the Union.

To read any of these books is to discover that Fiske is concerned not chiefly with events but with the meaning or philosophy of events; that he has a rare gift of delving below the surface, of seeing in the endeavors of a handful of men at Jamestown or Plymouth or Philadelphia a profoundly significant chapter of universal history. Hence we seem to read in his pages not the story of America but the story of Man. Moreover, he had enthusiasm; which means that his heart was young and that he could make even dull matters vital and interesting. Perhaps the best thing that can be said of his work is that it is a pleasure to read it,—a criticism which is spoken for mature or thoughtful readers rather than for those who read history for its dramatic or heroic interest.

Another feature of our recent prose is the number of books devoted to the study of American letters; and that, like the *Literary History* study of nature, is a phenomenon which is without precedent. Notwithstanding Emerson's plea for independence in *The American Scholar* (1837), our critics were busy long after that date with the books of other lands, thinking that there was no American literature worthy of their attention. In the same year that Emerson made his famous address Royal Robbins made what was probably the first

attempt at a history of American literature.<sup>1</sup> It consisted of a few tag-ends attached to a dry catalogue of English writers, and the scholarly author declared that, as there was only one poor literary history then in existence (namely, Chambers'), he must depend largely on his own memory for correcting the English part of the book and creating a new American part.



EDWARD EVERETT HALE

Nor were conditions improved during the next forty years.

After the war, however, the viewpoint of our historians was changed. They began to regard American literature with increasing respect as an original product, as a true reflection of human life in a new field and under the stimulus of new incentives to play the fine old game of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

In 1878 appeared Tyler's *History of American Literature 1607-1765* in two bulky volumes that surprised readers by revealing a mass of important writings in a period supposed to be barren of literary interest; and the surprise increased when the same author produced two more volumes dealing with the literature of the Revolution. In 1885 came Stedman's *Poets of America*,

<sup>1</sup> Chambers' *History of the English Language and Literature, to which is added A History of American Contributions to the English Language and Literature*, by Royal Robbins (Hartford, 1837). It is interesting to note that the author complained of the difficulty of his task in view of the fact that there were at that time over two thousand living American authors.

an excellent critical study of New World poetry; and two years later Richardson published the first of his two splendid volumes of *American Literature*. These good beginnings were followed by a host of biographies dealing with every important American author, until we now have choice of a large assortment of literary material where Royal Robbins had none at all.

Such formal works are for the student, but the reader who goes to books for recreation has also been remembered. Edward Everett Hale's *James Russell Lowell and his Friends*, Higginson's *Old Cambridge*, Howells's *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*, Trowbridge's *My Own Story*, Mrs. Field's *Authors and Friends*, Stoddard's *Homes and Haunts of our Elder Poets*, Curtis's *Homes of American Authors*, Mitchell's *American Lands and Letters*, — these are but few of many recent books of reminiscences, all bearing witness to the fact that American literature has a history and tradition of its own. It is no longer an appendix to English literature but an original record, to be cherished as we cherish any other precious national heritage, and to stand or fall among the literatures of the world as it shall be found true or false to the fundamental ideals of American life.

**Bibliography.** The best work on our recent literature is Pattee, *A History of American Literature since 1870* (Century Co., 1915), which deals with two hundred or more writers. A more sketchy attempt at a contemporaneous history is Vedder, *American Writers of To-day* (Silver, 1894, revised 1910), devoted to nineteen writers whom the author regards as most important.

From a multitude of books dealing with individual authors or with special types of literature we have selected the following brief list, which is suggestive rather than critical.

*Study of Fiction.* Henry James, *The Art of Fiction*; Howells, *Criticism in Fiction*; Crawford, *The Novel: What It Is*; Smith, *The American Short Story*; Canby, *The Short Story in English*.

*Biography.* Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe, by C. E. Stowe. Life of Bret Harte, by Pemberton, or by Merwin, or by Boynton. Life of Bayard Taylor, by Marie Taylor and Horace Scudder; or by Smyth, in *American Men of Letters*. Life of Stedman, by Laura Stedman and G. M. Gould.

Life of Thomas Bailey Aldrich, by Greenslet. Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett, edited by Annie Fields. Life of Edward Rowland Sill, by Parker. Thompson's Eugene Field. Mrs. Field's Charles Dudley Warner. Grady's Joel Chandler Harris. Life of Mark Twain, by Paine, 3 vols.

*Historical and Reminiscent.* Page, The Old South; Nicholson, The Hoosiers; Howells, My Literary Passions; Henry James, Notes of a Son and Brother; Stoddard, Recollections Personal and Literary, edited by Hitchcock; Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Chapters from a Life; Trowbridge, My Own Story.

## GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books dealing with individual writers and with limited periods are named elsewhere, in the special bibliographies that supplement each of the preceding chapters. The following works, selected from a much larger number, will be found useful for reference during the entire course of study.

**American Literature.** There is unfortunately no series of scholarly volumes covering the whole field, and nothing that approaches a standard history of the subject. One of the best general surveys is Richardson, *American Literature*, 2 vols. (Putnam, 1887). This is a critical work, containing no biographical material, and the historical sequence is broken by studying each type of literature (fiction, poetry, etc.) by itself. Other general surveys, containing a small amount of biography sadly interwoven with critical matter, are Trent, *American Literature* (Appleton); Cairn, *History of American Literature* (Oxford University Press); Wendell, *Literary History of America* (Scribner); and the Cambridge *American Literature*, 2 vols. (announced, 1916, Putnam). There are also a score of textbooks dealing briefly with the subject.

Among histories dealing with selected authors in groups or with the writers of some particular section of the country are *National Studies in American Letters* (Macmillan), which includes Higginson's *Old Cambridge*, Nicholson's *The Hoosiers*, Addison's *The Clergy in American Letters*, etc.; Fulton, *Southern Life in Southern Literature*; Moses, *Literature of the South*; Holliday, *History of Southern Literature*; Wauchope, *Writers of North Carolina*; Lawton, *The New England Poets*; Painter, *Poets of Virginia*; Venable, *Beginnings of Literary Culture in the Ohio Valley*.

**Poetry.** Stedman, *Poets of America*; Onderdonck, *History of American Verse*; Collins, *Poetry and Poets of America*.

**Fiction.** Loshe, *The Early American Novel*; Erskine, *Leading American Novelists*; Smith, *The American Short Story*; Baldwin, *American Short Stories*; Perry, *A Study of Prose Fiction*; Howells,

Criticism in Fiction; James, *The Art of Fiction*; Crawford, *The Novel: What It Is*.

**Miscellaneous Types.** Jameson, *History of Historical Writing in America*; Payne, *Leading American Essayists*; Brownell, *American Prose Masters*; Haweis, *American Humorists*; Payne, *American Literary Criticisms*; Sears, *History of Oratory*; Fuller and Trueblood, *British and American Eloquence*; Seilhamer, *History of the American Theater*; Hudson, *Journalism in the United States*; Thomas, *History of Printing in America*.

A very useful little book is Whitcomb, *Chronological Outlines of American Literature* (Macmillan), in which all important works are arranged, first, in chronological order, year by year, and then according to authors.

**Biography.** The best series of literary biographies is *American Men of Letters* (Houghton). A few American authors are included in *English Men of Letters*, *Great Writers*, the brief *Beacon Biographies* and other series. Biographical collections are Adams, *Dictionary of American Authors*; *Cyclopedia of American Biography*, 6 vols. (Appleton); Allibone, *Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors*, 6 vols. (Lippincott); Howes, *American Bookmen*; Fields, *Biographical Notes and Personal Sketches*.

**Selections.** Calhoun and MacAlarney, *Readings from American Literature*, containing selections from all important authors in one volume (Ginn and Company); Stedman and Hutchinson, *Library of American Literature*, 11 vols. (Webster); Duyckinck, *Cyclopedia of American Literature*, 2 vols. (Scribner); Bronson, *American Poems and American Prose*, 2 vols. (University of Chicago Press); Lounsbury, *American Poems* (Yale University Press); Stedman, *An American Anthology*, supplementing the same author's *Poets of America* (Houghton); Page, *Chief American Poets*, with very full selections from our nine elder poets (Houghton); *The Humbler Poets*, newspaper and magazine verse, 2 vols. (McClurg); *Golden Treasury of American Songs and Lyrics* (Macmillan); Rittenhouse, *Little Book of Modern Verse* (Houghton); Carpenter, *American Prose* (Macmillan); Johnson, *American Orations*, 3 vols. (Putnam); Harding, *Select Orations* (Macmillan).

*Library of Southern Literature*, 16 vols., a monumental work, edited under supervision of the University of Virginia (Martin and Holt Co., Atlanta); Trent, *Southern Writers*; Mims and Payne, *Southern Poetry*; Kent, *Southern Poets*.

**School Texts.** For the works of minor writers some of the anthologies named above are necessary; but the major authors may be read to better advantage in various inexpensive texts edited for class use. Such, for example, are Standard English Classics (Ginn and Company); Riverside Literature (Houghton); Pocket Classics (Macmillan); Lake Classics (Scott); Maynard's English Classics (Merrill); Silver Classics (Silver, Burdett); Johnson's English Classics (Johnson); English Readings (Holt); Eclectic Classics (American Book Co.); Everyman's Library (Dutton). There are nearly a score more of these handy little editions, lists of which may be obtained by writing to the various publishing houses, especially to those that make a specialty of schoolbooks.

**American History.** In studying our literature a good textbook of history should always be at hand; such as Montgomery, Student's American History, or Muzzey, American History, or Channing, Students' History of the United States. More extended works are much better, if the student has time or inclination to consult them.

A useful reference work in connection with our early literature is American History Told by Contemporaries, edited by Hart, 4 vols. (Macmillan). The American History Series, 6 vols. (Scribner), tells the story of America by epochs, the different epochs being treated by different authors. Another good history of the same kind is Epochs of American History, 3 vols. (Longmans). The most complete history is The American Nation, 27 vols. (Harper).

Political and party history in Stanwood, History of the Presidency (Houghton), and Johnston, American Political History, 2 vols. (Putnam).

Biographies of notable characters in American Statesmen (Houghton), Makers of America (Dodd), Great Commanders (Appleton), True Biographies (Lippincott), and various other series. National Cyclopedia of American Biography, 15 vols. (White).

Bibliography of the subject in Channing, Hart and Turner, Guide to the Study and Reading of American History, revised to 1912 (Ginn and Company); and in Andrews, Gambrill and Tall, Bibliography of History (Longmans).



# INDEX AND PRONOUNCING VOCABULARY

## KEY TO PRONUNCIATION

ä, as in fate; å, as in fat; å, as in arm; æ, as in all; ą, as in what; â, as in care  
ě, as in mete; ē, as in met; ê, as in there  
ି, as in ice; ି, as in it; ି, as in machine  
ଓ, as in old; ଓ, as in not; ଗ, as in move; ଓ, as in son; ଓ, as in horse; ଓ, as in food;  
୦ୟ, as in foot  
ୁ, as in use; ଉ, as in up; ଉ, as in fur; ଉ, as in rule; ଉ, as in pull; ଉ, French sound of u  
ୟ, as in fly; ଯ, as in baby  
ଚ, as in call; ଗ, as in mice; ଚି, as in child; ଏହ, as in school  
ଗ, as in go; ଗ, as in cage  
ସ, as in saw; ସ, as in is  
ଥ, as in thin; ଥ, as in then  
କ୍ଷ, as in vex; କ୍ଷ, as in exact

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